

Family health in rural areas get RM202m

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The main thrust of Budget 2002 for the health sector is family health programmes in rural areas where a sum of RM202 million has been proposed for the 383 health clinics nationwide.

Family health programmes in rural areas will continue to be given through midwife, village and health clinics to encourage the development of healthy families.

The Health Ministry has been allocated RM6.3 billion to build more hospitals, health and rural clinics, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Budget also proposes RM20 million for telemedicine.

Mahathir said the government will also provide a matching ringgit for ringgit grant, up to RM1 million, for sums raised by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in AIDS prevention and hospice programmes for treating serious cancer patients.

He said overtime allowances for government medical officers will be increased from

25% to 50%. Responding to the proposals, Malaysia Public Health Specialists Association president Prof Dr Syed Mohamed Aljunid said it is timely for rural health to be given its own allocation as previously it was under the primary health-care services.

Syed Mohamed said the government should have initiated the move earlier.

On telemedicine, he said although it has been in the country for some time, he fails to see its efficiency.

He suggested that the current telemedicine project be evaluated before being further implemented.

"A thorough study should be

done to ascertain which sector of the health industry will benefit the most from telemedicine.

"I think telemedicine is needed where there is poor communication."

Syed Mohamed also welcomed the ringgit for ringgit grant for NGOs in treating AIDS and cancer patients and the increase in overtime allowances for government medical officers.

The move will help keep morale up and prevent the officers from leaving the government service.

Primary Care Doctors' Organisation of Malaysia president Dr Molly Cheah wel-

comed the allocations and said she did not expect such a generous allocation.

"There is more emphasis on family health programmes in rural areas.

Overall, the budget is very good, considering the current economic climate," Cheah said.

Federation of Private Medical Practitioners' Association of Malaysia president Dr Chin Yoon Hiap welcomed the government's move to have the matching ringgit for ringgit grant for AIDS and cancer patients.

"Last year, the government only provided this for dialysis patients and I am happy to see that it has been extended to more needy patients."

