

Prostar an effective method to fight AIDS

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PENANG: The Asean region recently adopted Malaysia's Prostar concept to fight AIDS, as it has been recognised as one of the most effective methods in controlling the illness.

Incepted in 1996 by the Health Ministry, Prostar (Healthy Without AIDS Programme for Youths) promotes awareness on the dangers of AIDS among youths aged between 13 and 25.

The ministry's disease control director Dr Shafie Ooyub said the South-East Asian Ministers of Education Organisation Tropical Medicine centre had decided to introduce this concept to its other member countries late last year.

"Indonesia adopted the concept in the middle of this year while the other countries will follow soon," he said after launching the state-level World AIDS Day 2001 yesterday.

Dr Shafie said Prostar currently had 20,000 active members, who had conducted 2,500 AIDS awareness sessions for some 500,000 people nationwide since its inception.

Also present were state acting health director Dr Azmi Shafie and some 160 Prostar members.

In Ipoh, Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said the ministry had to date approved applications from 22 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for 1,096 kidney patients in 42 centres to qualify for a subsidy of RM50 per treatment.

Chua said the subsidy was the government's recognition of the good service provided by haemodialysis centres run by NGOs on a charitable basis.

He said NGOs that wish to benefit from the subsidy must apply to the ministry via the prescribed forms.

"This financial assistance has already taken off on April 1 this year. The ministry has appointed the National Kidney Foundation as the body to administer and co-ordinate the payment of this subsidy to approved NGOs."

He said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had announced in his recent Budget speech an allocation of RM10mil for the purpose.

"The subsidy will not completely do away with the need for fund-raising, but it will help reduce the financial burden of NGOs substantially," he said when opening the Perak Aromatic Qi Gong Society's dinner and song contest to raise funds for the Perak Moral Uplifting Haemodialysis Centre here last Friday.

Chua said Malaysia had about 2,300 new cases of kidney-failure every year.

"Fortunately for these people, the availability of haemodialysis treatment facilities throughout the country has made it possible for them to improve their life expectancy and quality of life," he added.

However, because of the increasing number of patients who need haemodialysis each year, government hospitals are not able to cope with all the patients.

"Thankfully, many NGOs have chipped in to help. At the end of last year, we have on records 55 NGO haemodialysis centres," he said.