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Anwar rejects offer for treatment locally

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has rejected the Government's offer for him to undergo treatment for his slipped disc condition locally.

In a letter released by his wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail at a Press conference today, Anwar said he would not accept the microscopic disectomy method recommended by the Government.

"I emphasise again that as a patient, I will choose the procedure which I think is best for me.

"From the start, I have preferred endoscopic surgery for it is less complicated, less invasive, less risky and recovery from it is faster," he said in a letter, copies of which were made available to the Press.

Anwar said as he suffered from cervical spondylosis of the neck, he would also not opt for microscopic-disectomy which allows operation under general anaesthetic which he claimed, had higher risks compared to local anaesthesia.

This was the main reason why he preferred endoscopic microsurgery which is performed under local anaesthesia.

The letter, dated April 30, was sent to Kuala Lumpur Hospital director Dr Abdul Razak Kechik.

Anwar reiterated that he did not wish to delay treatment.

Yesterday Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government's decision not to allow Anwar to seek medical treatment abroad was final.

The Prime Minister said Anwar was trying to politicise his illness and that doctors had certified he could be treated locally.

The Health Ministry had given Anwar five options to treat his slipped disc.

Two of them were either endoscopic surgery by Dr Thomas Hoogland or laser surgery by Dr Kazem Dajavadkhani, both of whom are Anwar's private consultants.

Another two options are either open surgery at Kuala Lumpur Hospital or microscopic surgery as recommended by 14 consultants appointed by the Government, also at KLH.

The fifth option is to do nothing and continue to receive conservative treatment in prison.

Also present at the Press conference were Anwar's counsel Sankara N. Nair, Sunway Medical Centre neurosurgeon Dr Richard Veerapen and Dr Halili Rahmat, who had treated previously Anwar for cervical spondylosis.

When asked why Anwar had not opted for local treatment, Sankara said the authorities had only allowed Anwar to undergo open microscopic disectomy of the lumbar spine and not as reported in newspapers and the electronic media.

"I have documents to prove that Anwar was only offered one option," he said.

Wan Azizah said Dr Hoogland, who had examined Anwar on March 10, had also refused to treat him as the Government had questioned his professional integrity.

"He has been insulted and attacked since January and unreasonable conditions have been imposed to prevent him from coming to Malaysia."

She said she last spoke to Dr Hoogland about four days ago.

In his letter, Anwar said he would hold the Malaysian authorities responsible should anything untoward happen to him as a result of the

delay in his treatment.

When asked to comment on Dr Mahathir's statement that Malaysian doctors had treated successfully patients with similar medical problems like Anwar's, Dr Veerapen said he agreed with the Prime Minister.

However, Dr Veerapen said there were no "dedicated spinal surgeons" in Malaysia who could provide a similar guarantee as that given by Dr Hoogland.

Asked whether Malaysian hospitals and medical centres had sufficient facilities to treat Anwar, Dr Veerapen said there were.

"But we don't know what are Dr Hoogland's minimum standards. He probably wants to treat Anwar in Munich because that is his own turf and the chances of his performing well are better in his own clinic," he said.

To a remark by Dr Hoogland that the HKL operation theatre was like a kitchen, Wan Azizah said it was only a figure of speech.

Sankara said Anwar would consider taking legal action against the Government if he is not allowed to get the doctor of his choice.

He said there were no specific provisions in any legislation that governed prisoners in Malaysia which prohibits their legal rights as patients.

"Our client has noted that his preferred choice of endoscopic micro surgery is not included as one of the options offered by HKL despite repeated requests for it."

He said he would meet Anwar next week to discuss the next course of action.

Anwar, who was admitted to KLH on Nov 25 last year, is still undergoing treatment there. This makes him the longest-staying patient at a government hospital for a slipped disc.

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