

28/09/2001

Easy access to medical facilities

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Equitable and easy access to health facilities and healthcare services must be ensured at all times as they are important healthcare indicators.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said accessibility was a vital indicator as it showed whether individuals could get the services they needed.

Dr Mahathir said every country must look into the people's needs, cultural and social environments as well as other health-related factors to determine the best type of healthcare for the masses.

Opening the 89th World Dental Congress in Bukit Jalil here today, the Prime Minister also called for a balanced health system.

"There is a need for balanced health system, where due emphasis is given to health promotion, disease prevention, early detection of serious illnesses, prompt treatment, rehabilitation and universal access to healthcare befitting the condition and situation of the country," he said.

On dentistry, Dr Mahathir said the profession had developed from an artisan occupation which concentrated on cleaning and extracting to a professional vocation in less than two centuries.

"Even in this country in the old days there was a group of tradesmen who provided these services from house to house or along the roadside and people were satisfied as knowledge and awareness was extremely low at that time," Dr Mahathir said, adding that at present the situation was such that dentistry had paralleled medicine in the forefront of modern health profession.

He added that dentistry had also shifted its focus from the mere concern of healthy teeth and gums to the broader perspective of oral health.

Dr Mahathir, who is a medical doctor by training, told the thousands of delegates and participants that while oral health was undergoing fundamental changes, health-related professionals should also review their priorities.

He said that excessive pre-occupation with individualistic care might distort beyond proportion the interest of communities.

"This can become a dilemma for many health professionals in many societies.

"The need to do the best and the most for the patient must be tempered with concerns of providing basic care for the masses."

Dr Mahathir said he expected the WDC 2001 would strive to ensure that the credibility of the oral health profession remained intact and grew from strength to strength.

During the ceremony, Datuk Dr A. Ratnanesan from Malaysia was installed the new president of the World Dental Federation (FDI).

He replaced out-going president Dr Jacques Monnot from France.