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Aids- Doctors

DOCTORS NEED TO BE RE-EDUCATED ON HIV/AIDS FOR EARLY DIAGNOSIS

PETALING JAYA, May 2 (Bernama) -- Doctors, especially those who graduated from university before cases of HIV/AIDS surfaced would need to re-educate themselves on the early diagnosis of HIV/AIDS so that treatment could be carried out on their patients, thereby saving their lives.

Head of Infectious Diseases, Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman said early symptoms of HIV/AIDS were similar to tuberculosis and dengue fever, and doctors needed to familiarise themselves with these symptoms.

She said there had been cases where a patient was diagnosed with a brain tumor but the truth was he was suffering from a brain abscess due to complications of HIV/AIDS.

Dr Adeeba, one of the prominent HIV/AIDS specialists in the country, was speaking to reporters after a Media Training on HIV/AIDS titled "Beyond faces, beyond Images" organised by the Malaysian Council of AIDS here today.

She was presenting a paper on "An overview on HIV/AIDS from the aspects of epidemiology, treatment and prevention programmes".

She said claims by doctors that HIV/AIDS cases were mostly from among injection drug users (IDU) and homosexuals was a misconception.

A University of Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC) survey of 378 patients who were found to be positive with HIV/AIDS from 1986 until 2000 found that about 50.8 per cent or 192 cases were heterosexual, while 141 cases or 37.3 per cent were injection drug users, and 13 cases or 3.4 per cent were homosexual.

Dr Adeeba said in her course of work, there was even a 66-year-old grandmother who was found to be HIV positive.

She said there was a need for doctors to carry out HIV/AIDS tests on their patients despite their age, social standing or occupation since the number of HIV/AIDS cases was on the rise.

As at Dec 2001 there were 44,208 HIV/AIDS cases, with women numbering 10 per cent of the total.

Dr Adeeba said lack of clinical skills and interest among doctors have been identified as some of the problems that needed to be tackled in order to reduce incidence of HIV/AIDS cases.

Besides lack of awareness, there was lack of laboratory skills and facilities and limited financial commitment from the government, she said.

She said there were only seven HIV/AIDS specialists in the country, and not many were keen to take up that field of study as it did not offer good returns compared with other fields such as cardiology.

She said the survey showed that among the group that tested positive for the condition, 78 per cent were already in serious condition upon admission while 56 per cent did not know they were infected.

She said there was a need to encourage Malaysians to come forward and undergo the HIV/AIDS tests so that early treatment could be carried out on them, thereby saving their lives and reducing the spread of the disease.

Although she disagreed with compulsory testing, as required by the Johor state government for Muslims who planned to get married, Dr Adeeba said they needed to carry out counselling and follow-up treatment for those found to be positive.

She said it would be pointless to leave those tested positive to be on their own without any guidance or assistance, since many still did not have any knowledge of the disease.

She also said steps were being taken to seek ways to reduce the

cost of treatment for HIV/AIDS which was RM2,000 a month previously and had been reduced to RM600 to RM700 per month currently.

Meanwhile, MAC President Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir lamented that despite efforts being made to create more awareness among the public there were still senior government officials who were still in the dark when it comes to knowledge about the disease.

Marina said besides going down to explain to the grassroots, MAC was now making inroads into the public sector by holding seminars and dialogue sessions with government officials for better understanding of the condition.

She said last year the council had participated in seminars and dialogues with members of Parliament and State Assemblymen and would target the ministries this year.

She also said the council was trying to seek funds from other sources, including from abroad since the government had only allocated RM115,000 last year for its activities, which was still below its RM2 million annual operations costs.

The highest government contribution the council received was RM1.8 million in 1998, she added.

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