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Foolhardy attitude resulting in cancer

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NILAI, Mon. - Four persons get cancer each hour and 35,000 new cases occur each year in the country. The incidence of cancer is estimated to be around 150 per 100,000 population.

But this does not stop Malaysians from indulging in filthy habits that kill, such as smoking.

Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said the foolhardiness of people was one of the factors that contributed to the rise in the number of cancer cases every year.

"Cigarette is a fire at one end and a fool at the other. However, some Malaysians still indulge in habits that kill.

"There is no doubt in the minds of people today that smoking causes all forms of cancer. The Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) wants the ministry to take the lead to change the people's attitude towards smoking, yet they still spend their money on cigarettes."

Saying that smoking was disease- and cancer-bearing, he said it could also cause impotence.

"They (the public) try to remedy it by buying tongkat ali but at the same time they continue smoking. It is an absolutely obnoxious and filthy habit that should be got rid of," Chua said after presenting a ISO 9001/2000 accreditation certificate to the Nilai Cancer Institute near here today.

Present were institute chairman of the board of directors Dr Kim Tan, general manager David Pilling and PK Resources Berhad chairman Datuk Dr Gan Kong Seng.

Globally, Chua said, cancer affected 10 million people and caused six million deaths every year.

"With the proportion of senior citizens above 60 increasing and the increasing prevalence of unhealthy lifestyles associated with smoking, excessive weight gain and lack of lifestyle, cancer cases in Malaysia are expected to rise further in the years ahead," he said.

Chua said statistics showed that cancer ranked second in the list of principal causes of deaths, causing 4,701 of the 43,514 medically certified deaths in the country in 1998.

The number of deaths due to cancer in hospitals had gone up 29 per cent, from 2,196 deaths in 1991 to 2,832 deaths in 2000.

Cancer had become a national concern, Chua said. "While many genes have been identified to be involved in cancer, the actual mechanism is largely unknown. Thus, functional studies of these genes are of utmost importance."

"Although considerable progress has been made worldwide, there is still a need for research in cancer, peculiar to this region and Malaysia, such as nasopharyngeal carcinoma," he added.

Chua also said strategies for the primary prevention and early detection of oral cancers and pre-cancers, breast and cervical cancers should be drawn up.

"One-third of all cancer cases are preventable and a further one-third are potentially curable if diagnosed early. Palliative care of the remaining one-third of cancer patients can bring about substantial improvement in one's life."

Chua also said the Institute for Medical Research and the Herbal Medicine Research Centre in the Cancer Research Centre would collaborate

on the use of local herbs in cancer treatment.

"Hopefully, through this collaboration, we can come up with drugs from the jungles and reserves in Malaysia."

Chua also called on Malaysians who had made it big overseas to return and do "national service" by trying out new drugs and treatments on cancer-stricken patients.

"If they do not want to come back, collaborate with the research institutes in the country."