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Small towns to get dialysis centres

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SEREMBAN, Thurs. - The Cabinet has ordered the construction of 45 haemodialysis centres, costing RM45 million, at district hospitals in remote and smaller towns throughout the country with immediate effect.

The centres should be ready by the end of next year and all should be fully operational by early 2004.

Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said the decision was reached during the Cabinet meeting yesterday.

"Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad), in his capacity as the Finance Minister, directed that such centres be set up in all government hospitals in smaller towns.

"We do not want to burden patients who are already poor. With these centres, they do not have to endure long journeys to seek dialysis treatment," he said after opening the fourth scientific meeting of the ministry's Academy of Medicine of Malaysia today.

He said it was initially planned that the centres would be built over five years.

"This shows that the Government is prepared to spend substantial sums of money for the needy and poor."

Once completed, each centre will have at least four haemodialysis machines.

He said the Government had been subsidising a minimum of RM10,000 for each patient.

There are presently 7,110 patients seeking dialysis treatment.

Chua said there were 70 haemodialysis centres at government hospitals while non-governmental organisations had 62 such centres, private clinics (74), universities (five) and the Armed Forces (nine).

"With the completion of the new centres, dialysis service in this country will be in the ratio of 70 per one million population."

Chua added that the Government would allocate funds to train paramedics, doctors and staff to man the centres.

"The RM45 million allocation will be used just to build the centres alone."