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Marina-Aids

NATIONAL HAART FORUM 2002 EMPHASISES COUNSELING AND TREATMENT

KUALA LUMPUR, June 15 (Bernama) -- Trained counsellors can play a vital role in shaping positive mental attitude among HIV/Aids patients, which in turn can have a profound impact on the effectiveness of the medical treatment given, the Malaysian Aids Council (MAC) said today.

Besides medical treatment, patients needed support to cope with the emotional trauma of a debilitating disease, it said.

With this in mind, the council today organised the National HAART (Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy) Forum 2002 which emphasises the training of HIV/Aids healthcare professionals in counseling patients.

MAC president, Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, is hoping that the forum will bring much benefit to the participants in the area of treatment counselling and that the benefits will be passed to the patients.

"At the same time the forum will act as a platform for updates on HIV management and sharing of strategies among HIV specialists as well as counsellors," she told reporters after opening the two-day forum, here.

The forum, themed "Take HAART!", will focus on the use of combinations of antiretroviral drugs that have resulted in a dramatic improvement in the health status of a large number of HIV-infected individuals.

Held for the second time, it will cover talks on government policies and initiatives in the management of HIV patients, current advances in antiretroviral (ARV) treatment, HIV pathogenesis and HIV therapy in children.

A renowned specialist from Thailand, Dr Kiat Ruxrugtham, who is also the Deputy Director of the HIV-NAT (HIV Netherlands, Australia, Thailand Research Collaboration), will be sharing his experience with the participants.

In conjunction with the forum, the Malaysian Aids Foundation, MAC's fund-raising arm, received a contribution of RM20,000 from an international pharmaceutical company, Merck Sharp and Dohme (MSD).

Currently, an average of 13 HIV/Aids cases are reported daily in the country.

A total of 4,502 HIV/Aids-related deaths were reported in the country up to last year.

-- BERNAMA

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