

08/07/2003

Vocational service award for Health Ministry top gun

Annie Freeda Cruetz

MANY would have recognised him as the man who helped keep the nation abreast of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome or SARS for the past four months.

But few would have known that Health Ministry deputy director-general, Datuk Dr Ismail Merican, is also dubbed as the "Father of Haematology" for he has contributed extensively towards the research and development of liver disease treatment in the country.

His contribution to this field also included the founding of the Malaysian Liver Foundation and the setting up of a molecular research laboratory under the foundation.

For his personal dedication and commitment to the research and development in the field of liver diseases, the Rotary Club of Kuala Lumpur North conferred Dr Ismail with the club's "Vocational Service Award 2002/2003" recently.

Past president Dennis Low, who read Dr Ismail's citation at the award ceremony held at the Royal Selangor Club, said it was through hard work and dedication that he (Dr Ismail) had managed to set up the first dedicated liver unit at the Kuala Lumpur Hospital initially and now at Selayang Hospital, which is the only tertiary referral centre for liver diseases.

To date, the Selayang Hospital has a special ward dedicated to dealing with challenges and complex liver diseases referred to the unit from all over the country and sometimes, from overseas.

Low said Dr Ismail was the principal investigator for more than a dozen of multi-centre international trials and studies on hepatitis to the extent that he was invited to present a paper on hepatitis at the World Congress of Gastroenterology last year.

Dr Ismail has also co-authored books, published researches and presented papers on various aspects of liver diseases.

On receiving the award, Dr Ismail said infectious diseases such as hepatitis could be prevented if everyone took the necessary precautions.

"In the early days, these diseases had no cure, but today, with the advancement of science and technology, there are better ways of curbing and controlling the diseases at the early stage," he said.

He also said that he was honoured to be presented with the award.

Dr Ismail encouraged the club to work together with health-related organisations to create awareness on liver diseases among the public.

"We have to realise that liver diseases are curable if detected in their early stages."

The Malaysian Liver Foundation, he said, was hosting a charity dinner on Sunday at the grand ballroom of Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel in Bandar Sunway, Selangor to raise funds to enable the foundation to have its own building.

"The money raised will also be used to create awareness on liver diseases among the public and to improve the quality of treatment and research on liver diseases."

At the charity dinner, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is the foundation's patron, would be paid a special tribute for his support in the foundation's numerous activities and campaigns.