

Faster help on the way with 800 ambulances

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KUALA LUMPUR: Help is on the way. Some 800 ambulances will be bought under the Ninth Malaysia Plan to help tackle a shortage which is delaying the response time.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek also said that the Economic Planning Unit was studying the proposal to lease the vehicles or outsource the ambulance service.

He was commenting on a *New Straits Times* report that the shortage of ambulances was nearing critical levels and that the state of medical emergency response was not up to international standards.

The AST found out that there is not even a clear picture on how many ambulances there are in the country.

In the Klang Valley, the 14 all-day ambulances cater to 6.5 million

people and the response is usually more than 15 minutes.

Dr Chua conceded that the ambulance service posed a big problem to his ministry.

He noted that there were 1,000 ambulances in the country but believed many were out of service after years of abuse.

"The ambulance" service has been a headache for the government: normally, a new vehicle will break down after only four years due to poor handling.

"Because of this, the ministry feels it is better to rent the ambulances or pay to use the private ones available," he said after launching the "Special Discounted Indemnity Insurance Scheme for Young Medical Doctors" here yesterday.

Dr Chua said the ministry had submitted a proposal to this effect.

"We are awaiting the outcome of the study. We will then do an in-depth study on the ambulance service."

The ministry plans to have an Ambulance Call Centre and enough ambulances to reach patients within 10 minutes of a call.

But Dr Chua cautioned that a large number of ambulances need not necessarily guarantee quality service.

"It's akin to being at a restaurant. The presence of many waiters does not mean your food will arrive fast,"

At the function, Dr Chua presented a RM10,000 cheque from the Malaysian Medical Association to the family of the late Dr Norbaizura Yahya.

Dr Norbaizura, who was attached to the Seremban Hospital for two months, was escorting a patient to Selayang Hospital in an ambulance when it skidded and landed in a ditch after one of its tyres burst along the North-South Highway near Bangi.

After 16 days in a coma, Dr Norbaizura died in the Serdang Hospital's Intensive Care Unit on Sept 19.