

# National Cancer Institute a step closer to reality

NST-10/11/2007

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**PUTRAJAYA:** The country's first comprehensive cancer treatment and research facility will be ready in about two years.

Costing RM340 million, the National Cancer Institute will bring under one roof the different approaches to fighting cancer through education, treatment, rehabilitation and research. It is a private finance initiative (PFI) project approved by the Cabinet in 2005.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who carried out the ground-breaking here yesterday, said the project showed the government's commitment to fighting the rising number of cancer deaths.

He called for thorough and careful planning for the institute so that equipment purchased or ordered now would not be obsolete by the time construction was finished.

He also called for the training of oncologists and recruitment of experts now to man the institute once it opens.

The 252-bed institute will also have a unit on traditional or complementary medicine, drawing on the expertise of local practitioners and foreign knowledge on Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine.

"We must not close our minds to traditional medicine which can complement modern medicine. Sophisticated and high-tech equipment like MRI machines will still be needed, but traditional medicine can help strengthen the body and lessen the pain of cancer treatment," said Abdullah, whose late wife, Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, also used traditional medicine in dealing with the cancer that took her life.

Abdullah said education would be an important function of the in-



In a symbolic ceremony, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi waters the 'Tongkat Ali' saplings planted after the ground-breaking at the site of the National Cancer Institute in Putrajaya yesterday.

stitute, as family members of cancer patients needed to understand the disease and provide encouragement to patients.

"I spent five years supporting my wife in her battle with cancer. The support of family is crucial; I cannot overstress its value."

Until the building is completed, certain high-tech equipment such as the Cyclotron and PET-CT scanner meant for the institute will be used in the Putrajaya Hospital.

The institute will provide com-

prehensive cancer services such as radiotherapy, oncology, nuclear medicine, palliative care, surgery, training, research, patient education, alcohol and smoking addiction programmes, and have traditional medicine and home nursing units.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek, who attended the ground-breaking, said 40,000 Malaysians were diagnosed with cancer every year, 80 per cent of them in the later stages. Cancer

deaths rose from 7.3 per cent in 1975 to 19.5 per cent in 2004.

Dr Chua said the institute was in urgent need of clinical oncologists, of whom Malaysia had only 37.

He said at least 10 experts had to be trained a year to meet the World Health Organisation ratio of one oncologist to every 250,000 people.

"At the moment, we are training two to three a year. We will have to get the institute started with experts from abroad first."