

Early detection better than cure

KUALA LUMPUR — Statistics from the Health Ministry has revealed that 19,000 out of 100,000 citizens are suffering from cancer.

Deputy Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Hilmi Yahaya said deaths from cancer in government hospitals were the fourth highest (13.02 per cent) in 2014. The highest deaths are related to diseases affecting the circulatory system at 23.34 per cent.

He said the top five most common cancers among patients in Malaysia are breast cancer (48.5 per cent), colorectal cancer (12.1 per cent), lung cancer (11.8 per cent), cervical cancer (5.7 per cent) and throat cancer (5.4 per cent).

"The public should conduct early check-ups to determine if they have a diagnosis so it can be treated as soon as possible," Dr Hilmi said after launching the sixth Annual Colorectal Cancer Awareness, Screening and Treatment Project (CCASTP) here yesterday.

He said colorectal cancer is the most common cancer among males above 50 and the second highest for women after breast cancer.

Women are the riskiest group of being diagnosed with cancer with about 10,240 patients per 100,000 females.

Common and noticeable symptoms of colorectal cancer are changes in bowel habits and blood in patient's faeces. Risks of being diagnosed with colorectal cancer include a patient's medical history, polyps (non-cancerous growths in the lining of the large intestines), family hereditary, sedentary lifestyle and age.

Project organiser, the Cancer Advocacy Society of Malaysia (Empowered), said the programme aims to raise awareness about colorectal cancer through early detection, particularly among low-income groups.

Its president and consultant medical oncologist, Dr Christina Ng Van Tze, said the lack of awareness is attributed to cancer taboos.

"Several studies have shown that low health literacy, education levels and language barriers influence an individual's ability to navigate the medical system, understand screening options and communicate with medical professionals," she said.

Statistics by the ministry shows that colorectal cancer is diagnosed when it is in the fourth stage at 32 per cent compared with the first stage at nine per cent.

Dr Ng said since the inception of the programme six years ago, CCASTP had helped nearly 75,000 under-privileged Malaysians through early detection of colorectal cancer with patient's medical expenses fully paid by the organisation.

"CCASTP consists of four phases. Awareness workshop and selection to identify patients are conducted in the first phase," he said.

"In phase two, screening workshops and residents will be given instructions on how to use the faecal immunohistochemical test (FIT) kit.

"Phase three will be the collection of FIT kits and laboratory analysis. In phase four, our nurses will break the news to the patients and hospital appointments for colonoscopy will be arranged under our patient support programme."