

AKHBAR : BH AHAD  
MUKA SURAT : 4  
RUANGAN : NASIONAL

## SOP baharu Jabatan Patologi elak kes rasuah

**Iskandar Puteri:** Jabatan Patologi di sebuah hospital di negeri ini menetapkan prosedur operasi standard (SOP) baharu yang lebih ketat bagi mengelakkan kes rasuah membabitkan ahli patologi.

Pengerusi Jawatankuasa Kesihatan dan Perpaduan Johor, Ling Tian Soon, berkata beliau percaya semua kakitangan di jabatan itu dapat mematuhi SOP baharu berkenaan.

Beliau berkata, hanya segelintir kakitangan Jabatan Patologi termasuk ahli patologi dan pem-

bantu makmal yang sedang disiasat berhubung kes itu dan mereka telah dipindahkan tempat kerja.

“Jika mereka yang disiasat ini ada buat salah, biarlah mereka berdepan dengan hukuman undang-undang.

“Namun sekiranya tidak bersalah, Suruhanjaya Pencegahan Rasuah Malaysia (SPRM) perlu mempercepatkan siasatan tersebut supaya mereka yang tidak bersalah dapat memersihkan nama mereka dan Jabatan Patologi terbabit,” kata-

nya ketika ditemui di pejabatnya di Kota Iskandar, di sini baru-baru ini.

Beliau berkata, kerajaan negeri memandang serius kes itu dan Jabatan Kesihatan Negeri Johor (JKNJ) serta hospital terbabit sentiasa memberi kerjasama sepenuhnya kepada SPRM untuk melakukan siasatan.

SPRM sebelum ini menahan seorang pegawai patologi sebuah hospital yang disyaki merasuah ahli patologi di sebuah hospital di negeri ini berhubung keputusan ujian saringan

air kencing.

Penahanan itu dibuat susulan wujud persoalan berhubung ratusan kes dadah yang mungkin dilepaskan dan perlu disiasat semula, ekoran perbuatan ahli patologi terbabit.

Beberapa media melaporkan, hasil siasatan SPRM mendapati 33 pegawai dan penolong pegawai penyiasat di Jabatan Siasatan Jenayah Narkotik seluruh daerah di Johor dipercayai terbabit bersama ahli patologi itu sejak 2018.

Pada 10 Januari lalu, Ketua

Polis Johor, Datuk Kamarul Zaman Mamat, dilapor berkata pihaknya membuka kertas siasatan tatatertib terhadap sebahagian daripada 33 pegawai dan anggotanya yang terbabit dalam kes rasuah membabitkan ahli patologi di sebuah hospital.

Kamarul Zaman dipetik sebagai berkata, mereka yang terbabit sudah dipindahkan tempat kerja supaya tidak lagi melakukan penugasan yang sama sehingga siasatan selesai.

BERNAMA



AKHBAR : SUNDAY STAR  
MUKA SURAT : 2  
RUANGAN : NATION

# Battling to end cervical cancer

Health officials work on ramping up vaccination, screening and treatment

By RAGANANTHINI VETHASALAM  
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**PETALING JAYA:** It is estimated that more than half of all cervical cancer patients in Malaysia die from the disease, but public health officials are working hard to bring these numbers down to almost nil within the next 10 to 20 years.

The latest figures provided by the Global Cancer Observatory show that in 2020, 1,740 women in Malaysia contracted the disease, of whom 991 or 57% did not survive.

The reason for the high death rate, said National Cancer Society Malaysia (NCSM) managing director Dr Murallitharan Munisamy, is that 40% of cervical cancer cases are detected late, thus reducing the chances of survival. "More than 40% of our cases are detected at stage 3 or 4. Because of that, in Malaysia, the mean survival rate is only three in 10 women who survive past five years after a cervical cancer diagnosis.

"The issue is late diagnosis. This is where we need to do a lot more to make sure that people actually get screened," he said.

January is cervical cancer awareness month and in 2018, the World Health Organisation (WHO) made a global call for action to eliminate cervical cancer by 2030.

Malaysia could reduce the number of cases in the next one to two decades with ramped up vaccination, screening and treatment.

**"The issue is late diagnosis. This is where we need to do a lot more to make sure that people actually get screened."**

Dr Murallitharan Munisamy

"Give it about 10-20 years and we will have almost negligible cases of cervical cancer that actually need to be treated," said Dr Murallitharan.

Malaysia had been doing well with human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccinations, which can prevent cervical cancers, among schoolgirls since 2010 until the Covid-19 pandemic shut down schools.

"Unfortunately, vaccinations have slowed down since 2020 and we have not quite got back to our previous rate of vaccinations," Dr Murallitharan said.

The vaccine reduces the chances of contracting HPV, a common virus that spreads through skin contact, usually harmless but can cause cervical cancer.

The Health Ministry is currently running campaigns to cover those who have been left out while NCSM is running its own programme to distribute 300,000

doses of HPV vaccine donated by a pharmaceutical company.

Dr Murallitharan said that the prevalence of the oncogenic types of HPV has significantly gone down after Malaysia began the vaccination drive in 2010.

To increase the screening rate in the population, health officials are moving towards HPV DNA vaccines which are more cost-effective and convenient.

"With the new screening guidelines, pap smears are recommended at an interval of once every three years while DNA testing is recommended once in five years," he added.

Although Malaysia's on-going efforts against cervical cancer were temporarily derailed by Covid-19 lockdowns, Dr Murallitharan said there is a strong commitment to get them back on track and eliminate it by 2030.

According to the WHO, a country must reach and maintain an incidence rate of below four cases per 100,000 women in order to eliminate the disease.

To meet the WHO's global target, by 2030, each country must fully vaccinate 90% of girls with the HPV vaccine by the age of 15, screen 70% of women using a high-performance test by the age of 35, and again by the age of 45.

Countries must also treat 90% of women with pre-cancer and women with invasive cancer.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HPV VACCINE

It protects against certain types of high-risk HPV infections.

It helps the immune system produce antibodies that can fight HPV.

The individual is not infected with certain HPV subtypes

Lower risk of HPV-related cancers and warts

### Individuals infected with HPV

> Chronic HPV infection can cause cells to develop abnormally

> Low-risk HPV subtypes can lead to warts on the skin while high-risk HPV subtypes can lead to cancer

### Who should receive the vaccine?

> HPV can infect both females and males.

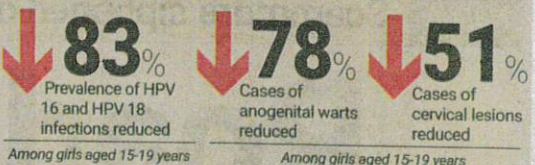
> Both females and males can receive the HPV vaccine to prevent diseases caused by HPV infection.

> The HPV vaccine can be given to individuals between 9-45 years.

> Seek a doctor's advice on whether you should get vaccinated.

> The HPV vaccine can prevent over 90% of cancers caused by HPV

Studies have shown the positive impact of receiving the HPV vaccine. After 9 years of vaccinating, there was a decrease in the number of cases below:



Source: National Cancer Society of Malaysia

TheStargraphics

FOR MORE:

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AKHBAR : SUNDAY STAR  
MUKA SURAT : 3  
RUANGAN : NATION

## Statistics on cervical cancer in Malaysia alarming

**PETALING JAYA:** Cervical cancer is ranked as the fourth most common cancer affecting women in Malaysia, with 1,740 cases in 2020 of whom 991 or 57% succumbed to the disease, according to the Global Cancer Observatory (GCO).

The GCO estimated that over 12 million women in Malaysia aged 15 and above are at risk of developing cervical cancer.

Another think tank, the HPV Information Centre, said it is the second most frequent cancer among Malaysian women between the ages of 15 and 44.

It is also the fourth most common cancer in women globally, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), after an estimated 604,000 new cases were diagnosed worldwide in 2020.

"About 90% of the 342,000 deaths caused by cervical cancer occurred in low- and middle-income countries.

"The highest rates of cervical cancer incidence and mortality are in sub-Saharan Africa, Central America and South-East Asia.

"Regional differences in the cervical cancer burden are related to inequalities in access to vaccination, screening and treatment services," WHO said.

Risk factors to contracting cervical cancers include the prevalence of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), sex, gender biases and poverty, the world body added.

Women living with HIV are six times more likely to develop cervical cancer compared with the general population, and an estimated 5% of all cervical cancer cases are attributable to HIV.

"The contribution of HIV to cervical cancer disproportionately affects younger women, and as a result, 20% of children who lose their mother to cancer do so due to cervical cancer," WHO added.

Another virus that contributes to this cancer is the human papillomavirus (HPV) – 88.7% of invasive cervical cancers are attributed to HPVs 16 or 18, said the HPV Information Centre.

"About 1.0% of women in the general population are estimated to harbour a cervical HPV-16/18 infection at a given time," it said.

WHO recommends HPV vaccination at the age nine to 14, to prevent HPV infection, cervical cancer and other HPV-related cancers.

It also recommends screening every five to 10 years from the age 30 for women to detect cervical disease, which when treated, also prevents cervical cancer.

"At any age with symptoms or concerns, early detection followed by prompt quality treatment can cure cervical cancer," WHO said.

"Cervical cancer can be cured if diagnosed and treated at an early stage of disease.

"Recognising symptoms and seeking medical advice to address any concerns is a critical step," it added.



AKHBAR : STAR HEALTH  
MUKA SURAT : 4  
RUANGAN : HEALTH



## The doctor says

DR MILTON LUM

LAST YEAR was an *annus horribilis* ("horrible year" in Latin) for Malaysian healthcare.

Nicotine delisting from the Poisons List on April 1 was the primary event that was deleterious to Malaysians' health.

It opened the floodgates to advertising, promotion and sales of nicotine products; entry of tobacco companies to the vaping market; and most importantly, legalised sales of nicotine products to everyone, including minors below 18 years, which is still occurring.

The important issues for Malaysian healthcare in this year of 2024 are discussed below.

### Nicotine addiction

Despite the World Health Organization (WHO) director-general's statement on June 2, 2023, that "e-cigarettes and vape must be regulated, dismissing the tobacco industry's claim of harm reduction with these nicotine products" and urging "please protect your citizens, especially your children", the colossal bungle of nicotine delisting was only somewhat mitigated by Parliament passing the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Bill 2023.

The shocking omission of smoking devices in the Bill, with the statement that safety standards of these devices would be regulated by the Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry, and manufacturing by the Investment, Trade and Industry Ministry, will pose a regulatory conundrum.

The regulations of the Bill, which will hopefully be implemented this year, can only limit the damage to the health of young Malaysians, many of whom could potentially become nicotine addicts.

Unlike Covid-19's acute impacts, the effects of nicotine delisting will not be obvious immediately, but in the medium to long term.

### More infections

Mutations of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes Covid-19, are continuing to occur globally.

Waves of new Covid-19 infections will occur this year, which the health system should hopefully be able to cope with.

What we know of long Covid is far from being complete.

However, the limited Malaysian data that we have now already raises the question

# A challenging outlook

Unresolved healthcare issues from 2023 are likely to carry forward to this year.

of whether long Covid will be the next chronic public health burden.

Dengue cases increased markedly in 2023.

Hopefully, the trend will go south in 2024, or at least, not increase further.

The virus with pandemic potential that most worries many is avian influenza (i.e. bird flu), as mutation can make it easily transmissible to humans.

Multiple human cases of bird flu were reported in China and Cambodia last year, together with two outbreaks of the highly pathogenic A(H5N1) influenza in Cambodian poultry farms.

Large and continual outbreaks of avian influenza in birds and mammals increases the likelihood of mutations.

Added to that the mixing of bird and human influenza genetic materials, and there is potential for a new virus with pandemic possibility.

### Non-communicable diseases

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) will continue to rise with increasing undiagnosed and uncontrolled numbers, because of uncoordinated control.

This will strain service delivery in the underinvested, overworked and crowded public healthcare system.

The effects of backlogged surgeries during the Covid-19 pandemic, and inadequate or no treatments for NCDs, will inevitably lead to premature and excess illness and death.

### Patient safety

A previous Health Minister informed Parliament that 46 public hospitals were more than half a century old, and more than half of the equipment is more than a decade old.

All these patient safety hazards have not been addressed by a definitive action plan, with timelines to upgrade the old hospitals and outdated equipment.

The fundamental principle in medicine, *primum non nocere* ("first, do no harm" in Latin) appears to have been ignored.

The public has a right to know how safe care is in the public sector.

Are there any indicators that patient safety improved in 2023?

The Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee abdicated its responsibilities when it found no one accountable for the procurement, without contract, of defective ventilators during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Will patient safety be ignored in 2024?

### Medical workforce

Doctors' crucial role in healthcare delivery was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic, when some doctors had to play God and decide who was to be ventilated or not – a difference between life or death.

Junior doctors play a vital role in hospitals as they are the ones implementing the decisions of the limited number of specialists and consultants.

While transfers have been the norm in the public sector for decades, junior doctors were treated poorly last year, with only a fraction getting permanent posts and transfers being messed up.

The multiple factors for the chaotic situation included poor coordination and communication between Putrajaya and community healthcare facilities; ignorance of facilities' needs and requests; and an insensitivity to the attitudes and needs of junior doctors.

Medical unemployment and disgruntlement will continue with the issue of contract doctors inadequately addressed.

The best and brightest will continue to seek employment abroad.

It is expected that junior doctors' problems will continue this year, but hopefully, there will be fewer management mishaps.

### Medical technologies

New technologies, e.g. diagnostics, smart drug delivery mechanisms, genome sequencing, machine learning, mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid) technology and artificial intelligence (AI), will increasingly impact on healthcare.

A fundamental element of electronic health records (EHR) is maintaining the confidentiality of patient health data.

Equally important is the public trust that their health data will indeed be kept confidential.

The Health Ministry's statement that EHR will be rolled out throughout the country by 2026 is very unlikely to occur.

If a third or half the country has EHR then, Malaysia would have already done very well.

After the adverse publicity surrounding the MySejahtera app, has public trust been regained when it comes to data safety?

Issues of patients' confidentiality and security, patient safety, and the successes and failures of new technologies, will continue to be problematic.

This is particularly so with the use of AI in healthcare.

The accountability and framework for safe and effective use of AI to meet the needs of all users has yet to be formulated.



Aside from the burden of diseases, the healthcare system in Malaysia also needs to tackle the issues of manpower, resources and new technologies, among others. – 123rf.com

It is vital to always remember that new technologies are just tools.

Discrimination and careful evaluation are critical for humane healthcare, and not just technological exuberance.

### Increasing expenditure

Healthcare expenditure and medical inflation will continue to rise because of:

- > Our ageing population
- > NCDs, including long Covid
- > Infectious diseases
- > New technologies
- > Increasing patient demands, and
- > Unrestrained middlemen and rent seekers in healthcare.

Increasing out-of-pocket expenditures in the private and public sectors will lead to more families facing financial ruin if they or their relatives get catastrophic diseases, e.g. cancer, heart attack or stroke.

More general practitioner (GP) clinics, and even some private hospitals, will close because of financial unsustainability, staff burnout and indiscriminate regulatory implementation.

There will be mergers, acquisitions and closures of some private medical schools because of financial unsustainability and reducing demand.

GPs' minimal or non-involvement in management of NCDs in public sector patients will impact negatively on population health and the risks of infectious diseases and NCDs.

### Public trust and health policies

Healthcare will be increasingly provided by non-health sectors with technological tools, posing regulatory problems.

The Health Ministry's budgetary allocations cannot assure improved patient safety and quality care unless wastages, inefficiencies and the role of middlemen and rent seekers are reduced markedly; and there is an open and just culture within the ministry.

As long as health policies are formulated without genuine consultation with stakeholders, success will be limited or absent.

Public trust will continue to wane for various reasons, including poor risk communication; non- or poor compliance to standard operating procedures; failure of authorities to engage meaningfully with the private sector, universities and civil society; misuse and abuse of social media; lack of transparency; and poorly

considered policies.

Will the pressure for change in public healthcare delivery come to a head this year and lead to improvements?

Last year was the first after the Covid-19 pandemic that exposed numerous examples of irresponsibility, unaccountability and incompetence, underpinned by arrogance and poor insight.

None of the data available indicated that our population health improved in 2023.

The 15th General Election led to the Ma'dani government, formed by component parties that all emphasised on health and healthcare in their manifestos.

There was much hype about the Health White Paper, which was adopted by Parliament last July.

Since then, the hype has died down to a whimper.

Will 2024 be a year of reckoning for the healthcare system?

### Stay healthy, all

Healthcare is avoidable by staying healthy.

A healthy diet, maintaining an appropriate weight, regular exercise, sufficient rest, safe sexual practices, avoiding nicotine exposure, moderate alcohol consumption, and keeping vaccinations current are necessary.

This requires effort, smart lifestyle choices and the occasional medical check-up.

NCDs, infectious diseases and other health risks can be minimised by compliance with one's individual responsibilities and vaccination.

Wishing all readers good health in 2024.

Take care of yourself and stay safe.

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