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(From left-right) Leonard Ariff Abd. Shatar (Director Pharmaceuticals Division), Professor Dr. Mohamad Hussain Habil (Head, Addiction Specialist and Consultant Psychiatrist), Professor Dr. Mustafa Ali Mohd (Deputy Dean, Faculty of Medicine UM), Datuk Dr. Mohd Hashim Tajudin (Group Managing Director) and Dr. Rusdi Abd Rashid (Coordinator, the University of Malaya Centre for Addiction Sciences) at the launch of the University of Malaya Centre for Addiction Sciences (UMCAS) and the Methadone Research Clinic.

Hope at UM for addicts

THE launching of University of Malaya Center for Addiction Sciences (UMCAS) and the Methadone Research Clinic yesterday gives hope for drug addicts.

Following the success of the Methadone Drug Substitution Therapy (MDST), to treat heroin addicts in the country, the centre and clinic will work to enhance and support Malaysia's addiction treatment strategies to reduce drug addiction and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

"MDST has proved to be more effective compared to the patient quitting cold turkey," said Dr Rusdi Abd Rashid coordinator and head of UMCAS. "The retention rate achieved 90 per cent success during the pilot project in 2005. A majority of our patients have managed to be employed after the treatment."

The therapy deals directly with the physiological processes that underlie addiction as well as the psychological craving. It gives a legally accessible and medically safe and effective treatment.

There are two phases to the treatment. Phase one is induction, where the patient comes in daily

and will be supervised under the treatment.

"In phase two, the patient will be allowed to takeaway dosage for three days," said Rusdi.

UMCAS is established as the first addiction research institute in Malaysia, and together with the Methadone Research Clinic, it is hoped to become the preferred one-stop centre of excellence for training, research and treatment of addictions.

It has the capacity to carry out clinical services such as heroin addiction treatment and scientific studies on methadone, alcohol, nicotine and other stimulants.

The issue of drugs is a complex one and has to be addressed with a strategy, explained Rusdi.

"No one party will be able to curb it. Cooperation between the government and private sectors will be needed to curb the situation and that is what UMCAS has to offer."

UMCAS is confident that they will be able to help elevate the country's harm reduction programme and achieve the government's goal of placing 25,000 addicts on MDST by 2015.