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# Contest aimed at wise choices on reproductive health

**THIS** is in response to the Thompson Reuters Foundation's report on the Ministry of Health's National Creative Video Competition on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health 2017, in particular the third topic on gender dysphoria, which an activist believes will encourage discrimination, hatred and violence towards minorities.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) is conducting the creative video competition to gather views and help enhance the knowledge and practice of healthy lifestyle among adolescents that pertains to sexual and reproductive health.

The competition themed, "Value Yourself, Practice Healthy Lifestyle" is a follow-up to the National Creative Video Competition on Adolescent Health 2016, whereby only 11 (2.9 per cent) video submissions were on sexual and reproductive health (SRH), compared to other topics such as physical activity and nutritional health (43 per cent), mental health (31.4 per cent) and high-risk behaviours (22.4 per cent).

This creative video competition is purely to tap the knowledge and creativity of adolescents on sexual and reproductive health-related matters and does not intend to create discrimination to any particular group.

It targets all adolescents aged 13 to 24 and is divided into three scopes to facilitate assessment by the jury based on health aspect.

This topic was chosen as the statistic showed an increase in SRH-related problems.

The Population and Family Survey by LPPKN (The National Population and Family Development Board) showed the trend of sexual activity among adolescents has increased from 0.9 per cent (1994) to 2.2 per cent (2004) and 4.8 per cent (2014). Whilst the Global School Health Survey (2012) among school-going adolescents aged 13-17 showed 8.3 per cent of them ever had sex and 50.4 per cent of them had their first sexual experience before the age of 14.

Unsafe sex results in sexually transmitted infections such as HIV. National HIV Surveillance showed the notification rate

of HIV among adolescents 13-19 years is on an increasing trend from 1.97 per 100,000 adolescents (2013) to 2.25 per 100,000 adolescents (2015).

The surveillance also revealed a significant rise in the percentage of HIV infections among homosexuals in Malaysia from 0.8 per cent (2010) to 46 per cent (2016).

Similar findings were noted in the Integrated Bio-Behavioural Surveillance (IBBS) between 2012 and 2014 where the rate of infection among key population men sex with men (MSM), transgenders and female prostitutes has increased from 7.1 per cent (2012) to 8.9 per cent (2014) among MSM, from 4.8 per cent (2012) to 5.6 per cent (2014) among transgenders and from 4.6 per cent (2012) to 7.3 per cent (2014) among female prostitutes.

Scientific evidence from local and abroad shows a close association between the risk of HIV with unhealthy SRH practices, which can be intervened through preventive activities and promoting a healthy lifestyle.

In the context that "prevention is better than cure", this competition aims to empower adolescents to make wise decisions and choices regarding their sexual reproductive health.

According to the Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Well Being (2016), investment in adolescent health and wellbeing brings benefit today, for decades to come and for the next generation. Adolescence is a critical phase in life for achieving human potential.

With regards to the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender), MOH embraces the principle of health for all without discrimination in providing health services. We have specific guidelines for all health workers to treat every client equally and with due respect to an individual's right.

In fact, MOH has gone the extra mile by providing services based on their specific health needs and collaborates closely with other agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Currently, there are 23 STI (Sexually Transmitted Infections) friendly clinics nationwide that provide services for

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specific high-risk groups and attendance is increasing daily.

It has special registration and service provision processes to improve acceptance and compliance to test and treat these special groups.

MOH is also in the process of expanding HIV screening services in the community by the community. MOH has also provided funding to NGOs for HIV-related activities.

This competition is in line with the

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), where it is the right of children and adolescents to obtain accurate and age appropriate information.

In conclusion, this competition targets all adolescents and never intended to discriminate any specific group.

It is not against human rights but indicates that MOH is concerned about the adolescents' sexual and reproductive health matters and if neglected, has dire consequences on their health.

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Youths take part in a greasy pole contest. The Health Ministry says the creative video competition is not intended to create discrimination against any particular group. — Picture by AFP