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# New centre to treat addicts

■ By R.S. Kamini

kamini@nst.com.my

**PETALING JAYA:** There is good news for those hooked on drugs or who have unhealthy obsessions.

Universiti Malaya has set up a new addiction research centre and clinic to rehabilitate drug and other substance abusers, including those with behavioural addictions.

The newly-launched Centre of Addiction Sciences (UM-CAS) provides training, research and treatment to complement the national harm reduction programme initiated by the government in 2005.

The programme, called the Methadone Drug Substitution Therapy (MDST), is targeted mainly at heroin addicts.



Dr Rusdi Abdul Rashid says the centre rehabilitates drug and other substance abusers

To date, about 7,000 addicts have sought treatment under the programme due to over-

crowded clinics and rehabilitation centres elsewhere.

The programme aims to place 75,000 addicts on MDST by 2015, to achieve one of United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.

UM, through the University Malaya Medical Centre, is the only university hospital involved in the MDST programme. It has treated close to 200 patients, while another 200 are on the waiting list.

UMCAS, which also houses the Methadone Research Clinic, not only provides treatment for various addictions and disorders but also trains those involved in rehabilitating and treating drug and substance abusers.

UMCAS coordinator Dr Rusdi Abdul Rashid said the cen-

tre had the capacity to carry out clinical services such as heroin addiction treatment and scientific studies on methadone, alcohol, nicotine and other stimulants, and help facilitate other community intervention programmes, such as the methadone maintenance treatment programme carried out in prisons.

"We will look into consultations and treatment for behavioural addictions such as those obsessed with gambling and the Internet, among other things," Dr Rusdi said after the launch of UMCAS yesterday.

"Our clinics are overcrowded. We hope this centre would cater to the growing demands of rehabilitation programmes," he said, adding that UMCAS would also be

studying other options to treat drug addiction.

The new clinic also offers treatment for HIV-positive patients.

UMCAS received a RM13,000 funding from CCM Duopharma Biotech Bhd in recognition of its effort to promote MDST and combat drug addiction.

Among those at the launch were UM's Faculty of Medicine deputy dean Prof Dr Mustafa Ali Mohd, CCM Duopharma group managing director Datuk Dr Mohd Hashim Tajuddin and UMMC's Department of Psychological Medicine head of addiction specialist Prof Dr Mohamad Hussain Habil.

UMCAS is located in Jalan 12/5, Petaling Jaya.

## QUICK FACTS ON METHADONE

- The government introduced the Methadone Drug Substitution Therapy in October 2005.
- It aims to place 75,000 addicts in the programme by 2015.
- Eighty per cent of 80,000 HIV/AIDS cases in 2006 comprised intravenous drug users.
- MDST has been proven effective following 90 per cent success in treatment, as those on methadone enjoy a one-year retention rate.
- Evidence shows HIV-positive victims on MDST exhibit higher level of compliance to anti-retroviral treatment.