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# Harm reduction project injects new life

THE implementation of the Harm Reduction Programme through Methadone Maintenance Therapy (MMT) and Needle Syringe Exchange Programme (NSEP) has shown positive results, with many kicking drug addiction and leading a quality life.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai says the success of the two programmes reflect the spirit of smart partnership and commitment between the government and private and non-governmental organisations in reducing the number of Malaysians hooked on dadah.

As for the NSEP which started in 2006 with cooperation from NGOs, he says it has been extended to 11 sites and 22 government health centres last year.

“The initial 42 outreach ports were expanded to 206 ports.”

As of December last year, Liow says, 18,377 drug addicts were placed under NSEP, with 66 per cent return rate of needles and syringes.

This year, he adds, the ministry is committed to delivering NSEP services through NGOs and public facilities.

He says there were 45 places in 2006 where drug addicts could get new needles and syringes after returning the used ones, and the number rose to 69 places in 2007, 116 in 2008 and 230 last year.

There were 4,357 registered addicts in 2006, followed by 6,658 in 2007, 12,230 in 2008 and 5,575 last year.

Of these numbers, he adds, 1,707 were regular addicts in 2006, 2,663 in 2007, 3,604 in 2008 and 4,184 last year.

“We also saw an increase in the number of addicts coming forward to do the HIV test.”

Of the 130 who volunteered to be tested for HIV in 2006, Liow says 37 were found positive while none of 119 tested in 2007 were victims of the disease.

Of the 356 tested for HIV in 2008, 35 were found positive while of 422 tested last year, 38 were found positive.

As for the MMT programme which began in October 2005, Liow said the number of patients increased from 1,241 in 2006 to 10,730 last year.

“We hope to increase the number of addicts under the

MMT programme this year to 25,000,” he says, adding that there are 157 MMT centres, the majority running at government hospitals and health clinics.

“We have 14 general practitioners, 19 district National Anti-Drug Agencies and 12 prisons that have also started the MMT programme,” he says, adding the average retention rate on the MMT programme was 70 per cent last year.

“This is among the best retention rates from similar programmes reported elsewhere in the world.”

Liow says they hope to increase the retention rate further, with a targeted 25,000 people this year.

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In the Needle Syringe Exchange Programme, drug addicts can get new needles and syringes after returning used ones.



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**NEEDLE  
SYRINGE  
EXCHANGE  
PROGRAMME**

	2006	2007	2008	2009
Registered clients	4,357	6,658	12,230	5,575
Regular clients	1,707	2,663	3,604	4,184
HIV-positive	37 (28.5%)	n/a	35 (22%)	38 (31%)
Return rate of needles and syringes	58.6%	62.2%	63.2%	65.9%