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A shoulder to lean on is what they need most

Jaspal Singh

MALAYSIANS are generous when it comes to giving donations in cash and kind for various causes.

But not many are forthcoming when it comes to getting their hands dirty, especially to those who are suffering from incurable diseases or terminal illnesses such as cancer, AIDS, diabetes and Alzheimers.

The lack of volunteers who are prepared to help these patients is sorely felt by organisations offering palliative care to them.

With only about 500 to 600 volunteers nationwide helping terminally ill patients, these voluntary organisations are now calling upon "brave hearted" Malaysians to step forward and be counted.

Perak Palliative Care Society president Dr Koh Wai Keat said since palliative care took off in Malaysia in the early 1990s the number of Malaysians showing support towards hospice services had been rising steadily.

However, he pointed out that most of the support had been in cash, equipment and other forms.

"We certainly appreciate every form of help given to us but we wish more Malaysians would come forward to volunteer physical assistance," he said on the sidelines of the 9th Malaysian Hospice Congress in Ipoh on Saturday.

The three-day Malaysian Hospice Congress, which ended yesterday, was held in conjunction with the 7th biennial general meeting of the Malaysian Hospice Council.

About 260 local and international

participants, including professionals and volunteers, attended the event, which serves as a platform for communication and networking among palliative care providers as well as to meet with experts in the field.

Dr Koh, who is also organising co-chairman of the Malaysian Hospice Congress, said a large number of palliative care patients received their treatment at home with nurses and volunteers visiting them on regular intervals or whenever a call was made to them for help.

He said the contributions of volunteers attending to the patients were immense.

Volunteers would help patients by attending to their day-to-day needs and provide essential emotional support to them.

"What these patients need is simply company — someone to talk or listen to them. Understandably, not many Malaysians are strong-hearted especially when confronted with terminal illness- and death-related situations.

"But, this is where we sorely need volunteers who can offer their time, mental and physical strengths.

"In short, we need brave-hearted Malaysians to come forward and take up the hospice cause."

He urged those who had prior experience where they had cared for their own family members who succumbed to advance incurable diseases to volunteer in providing palliative care to other patients.

He said those interested could join any of the 19 member organisations of the Malaysian Hospice Council by checking the details at malaysianhospicecouncil.blogspot.com.