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'Review laws on ethical issues'

MORAL CONSCIENCE Call to regulate practice of organ transplant, abortion and in-vitro fertilisation

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Parliament should review laws surrounding complex ethical issues such as organ transplantation, termination of pregnancies and regulation of in-vitro fertilisation, Raja Muda of Perak Raja Nazrin Shah said yesterday.

He said local healthcare and legal practitioners believed a review of current laws was necessary.

In light of cases in some countries where trade in organs was rampant, it would be important to outline rules in order to regulate the practice, he said at a conference on the conflicts and

controversies in medicine, ethics and law organised by the Medico-Legal Society of Malaysia.

Raja Nazrin said Malaysian law imposed criminal punishment under the Penal Code on doctors and patients who terminated pregnancies other than for certain prescribed reasons such as to save the mother's life.

"Doctors and patients are then forced to circumvent the law."

On the practice of in-vitro fertilisation, he said there was no legislation regulating it, which had led to countless viable embryos being disposed of each day.

"By itself, law is not equipped to resolve medicine's difficult moral issues.

"However, moral conscience can also be the precursor to the development of legal rules for social order."

Raja Nazrin said laws pertaining to patient confidentiality must main-

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tain a balance between individual interest in information privacy and public interest in information disclosure.

“Legal boundaries are often ill-defined and sometimes completely undefined due to challenges brought about by scientific advancement.”

In many countries, including Malaysia, conditions such as HIV and other infectious diseases continue to pose problems for health-care practitioners who must find

the middle ground between competing rights.

Raja Nazrin said some countries, like the United Kingdom, had developed extensive formal guidelines to address such issues of competing rights.

“There has never been a more appropriate time for the medical and legal fraternities to engage with policy-makers and the community to keep ethical and legal standards up-to-date,” he said.

He hoped practicable solutions

could be found during the conference to resolve current issues involving medicine, ethics and law.

The two-day conference, which began yesterday, features 18 speakers from the medical and legal professions.

The topics cover issues such as “HIV controversies in healthcare”, “Termination of pregnancy: how practical is the law due today?” and “Organ transplants and its ethical and legal complications — tackling difficult issues”.



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Raja Nazrin Shah