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'Set up one-stop AIDS centre'

INTEGRATED HEALTH SERVICES: Malaysia to follow Cambodian module on curbing disease

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FOLLOWING the success of Cambodia in reducing the number of HIV/AIDS patients and new infections, a medical specialist has called on the need for stronger HIV/AIDS programmes and for a one-stop centre for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Sungai Buloh Hospital senior consultant and infectious diseases physician Datuk Dr Christopher Lee said the programmes, however, should be integrated for a stronger network to better combat HIV/AIDS.

"We already have the programmes in place. We have programmes for HIV, tuberculosis (TB) and Hepatitis C, but these are all stand-alone programmes.

"Some have already begun to integrate, it is just a matter of speeding up and strengthening the whole process," he said at the 7th International AIDS Society (IAS) Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention 2013 at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre here yesterday.

He said the integration system done in Cambodia was exemplary, and that Malaysia was already

headed in the right direction.

At the conference, director of the National Centre for HIV, Dermatology and STI (sexually transmitted infections) of Cambodia Dr Mean Chhi Vun, in his opening plenary remarks, said Cambodia had managed to reduce its HIV

prevalence from an estimated 1.7 per cent in 1998 to a projected 0.7 per cent in 2011.

It also managed to reduce the number of annual new HIV infections from 20,000 in the early 1990s to around 1,300 last year.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, Dr Lee said it was important to make treatment easy and accessible to people living with HIV/AIDS and that stakeholders and the society at large should understand that it was a country's problem.

"We need early and focused interventions that are proven to not only reduce costs, but also be more effective in combating the spread of HIV."

He said there should be more focus on high-risk groups and it was important to have updated data on people who were at risk.

"Times have changed. Maybe 10 years ago, people only used heroin, but now there are all sorts of party drugs that can contribute to the transmission of HIV in many ways.

"It's not just about drug abuse.

There is also the factor of multiple sex partners and mother-to-child transmissions and we will have to move our focus along with the changes to the epidemic."

Dr Lee said there were special clinics to ease transition of children living with HIV to become

adults living with HIV.

He said there was a missing link as adolescents living with HIV, where they were not getting proper services to progress from treatment as children to treatment as adults.

"As children, they may not fully comprehend what they are dealing with. They are being given the medication and will take it without much question.

"As they grow older, they begin to understand what they have to deal with and this might bring their self-esteem down."

He added that with the availability of new treatments, more children were surviving and this should encourage more adolescent clinics focusing on how the affected group could progress to adulthood with ease.

Dr Lee said an adolescent clinic run by Kuala Lumpur Hospital helped adolescents living with HIV to phase out from child-HIV treatment to phasing in to adult-HIV treatment.



Sungai Buloh Hospital senior consultant and infectious diseases physician Datuk Dr Christopher Lee says programmes are already in place

