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# Follow S'wak example on blood tests for masseuse: Women

**Mary Chin**

**KOTA KINABALU:** Women groups in Sabah want the State Government to follow Sarawak's example making full-body health screening and blood tests mandatory for all body and foot massage therapists.

Effective this month, Sarawak became the first State in the country to have an across-the-board rule on this.

The Sabah Women's Advisory Council (MPWS) said, Thursday, ideally there should be one ruling for the whole country for uniformity under the 1Malaysia concept.

Its Chairperson, Datuk Asnimar Hj Sukardi, said it is important to regulate massage therapists more strictly so as to flush out those using massage parlours as a front for the flesh trade.

It is understood that Kota Kinabalu City Hall (DBKK) has a similar ruling, but it is not followed by every operator. While the genuine ones comply, others do not as evidenced by a recent crackdown that saw many Filipinas arrested. Some were found working using plantation work pass.

Sabah Women Entrepreneurs & Professionals Association (Swepa) President, Datuk Adeline Leong, said it would be good if the State Government were to impose a similar policy on all workers involved in health spas, reflexology centres and massage parlours throughout Sabah.

"The customers will be comfortable to know that they are in safe hands and such move will also augur well for the growth of the tourist industry. Many tourists usually end up having a massage after a hectic day of sightseeing and shopping," she said.

Noting the upward trend in HIV/AIDS cases in Sabah over the last six years, President of Peniaganita Sabah, Datuk Noni J. Said, also called for such mandatory ruling.

She stressed that all stakeholders, other than the Government, have a role to play in efforts to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS.

"We must not condone high-risk behaviour. It is common knowledge that some massage therapists offer sex services on the side and this has contributed to the

rise in sexually-transmitted diseases," she said.

Director of Jari Jari Spa, Jeanette Tambakau said it has been the practice and policy of DBKK for all spa operators and reflexology centres to have their staff and therapists screened for diseases prior to approval for renewal of trading licence.

"Besides, we must be issued with a health certificate before handling clients," she said.

"However, I would recommend greater coverage to include massage workers who are not attached to spas and reflexology centres or massage parlours."

Protem President of the Traditional & Complementary Medicine Association of Sabah (TCMAS), Dorothea Justin, expressed concern for the health status of traditional healers in rural areas.

According to her, the association has enlisted the help of village chiefs in locating the whereabouts of traditional healers, so that they (healers) too will undergo health screening.

Meanwhile, Dorothea urged the TCM Division to put a stop to unhealthy advertising by certain operators in local newspapers where it is stated that even though the girls are young, they are as good as traditional healers. "Such advertisements are unacceptable."

At a recent dialogue with State Community Development & Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk Hjh Azizah Mohd Dun, TCMAS called for all foreign body and foot massage therapists to be registered with MOH and TCMAS.

The dialogue heard that there were trainers from a neighbouring country, who trained locals in Rawatan Batin (RB) service for male customers with complaints of

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erectile dysfunction (ED).

“Although it is understood that such service is meant to restore manhood (as claimed), it could be abused by certain quarters to commit an immoral act,” she contended.

In response, Azizah said “extra services” should not be allowed.

In February this year, women leaders in Sabah questioned the apparent practice of “double standards” in the country when it comes to recruitment of foreign masseuse.

In the Peninsula, the Immigration Department will not allow foreign masseuse to enter to work unless they secure a support letter from the Ministry of Health (MOH) to endorse their qualification.

However, in Sabah, leniency on the part of enforcement agencies has been blamed for the State capital being “flooded” with Filipinas and China nationals involved in massage activities and “extra services”.

According to Dorothea, some spa centres in the peninsula have also resorted to pinching staff from centres in Sabah because of the difficulty in recruiting foreign masseuse there.



Adeline

Noni