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KUALA LUMPUR: The added risks in the medical profession is best exemplified by the case of Assoc. Prof Dr Lisa Black (pic).

Dr Black was infected with HIV in 1997 while attending to a patient. The accident would not have occurred if she had used a safer device.

As part of her nursing duties, she had inserted a syringe needle into the intravenous port of an advanced stage AIDS patient to draw out blood that was blocking his intravenous line.

The patient jerked and the needle with his blood came off the port and jabbed her on the left palm.

"I was terrified," said Dr Black, 39, of the incident that occurred at a Nevada hospital.

She had repeated blood tests and found out nine months later she had been infected with HIV and Hepatitis C.

"Although my HIV infection was treated early, the viral count in my body was not detectable and my T-cell count was still good, life was never the same again," said

Black.

Her injury was 100pc preventable if a safer device had been used, said Black.

Ironically, such a device was officially launched on the day of Dr Black's accident.

The new device is safer as it only requires a syringe – without a needle – to be linked to the tubing port.

The hospital pays for her medical bills for life. "So far, it has paid US\$1mil (RM3.4mil) over 12 years," she said during the Safety in Healthcare Conference here.

Dr Black also expressed her concern for her daughter Rebecca who is studying nursing at the University of Nevada.

"It is important we make sure that healthcare is safe for Rebecca and for everyone else's children who works in the healthcare sector," she said.

Head and senior infectious disease consultant at the Sungai Buloh Hospital Dr Christopher Lee said the World Health Report 2002 revealed that 2.5pc of HIV cases and 40pc of Hepatitis B and C cases among healthcare workers were the result of occupational exposure.