

Headline	FRONTLINER FOR HIV AIDS PROFESSOR DR ADEEBA KAMARULZAMAN ON THE CAUSE		
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FRONTLINER FOR HIV/AIDS PROFESSOR DR ADEEBA KAMARULZAMAN ON THE CAUSE CLOSE TO HER HEART

It's been a hard-fought battle all over the world, and in Malaysia, the fight against HIV/AIDS is led by Professor Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman, a woman who tackles the disease on multiple fronts.

The spirited and gracious professor, who is now the Dean of Medicine at the University of Malaya, began her career advocating HIV prevention, treatment and research in 1997 by establishing the Infectious Diseases Unit at the University of Malaya. From 2006 to 2010, she became President of the Malaysian AIDS Council and today remains Chairman of the Malaysian AIDS Foundation, positions that require her to run the implementation of community-based HIV/AIDS programmes throughout the country and to raise funds for HIV prevention, treatment and care programmes.

Dr Adeeba's tireless efforts continue as a committee member of regional and international organisations such as TREAT Asia, the United Nations, and the World Health Organisation. HELLO! sits down with her to reflect upon the HIV/AIDS situation in Malaysia and her experience from it.

Well done on the success of Malam Amal Tahajjud Cinta (MATC)! How does the involvement of celebrities such as Dato' Siti Nurhaliza impact your cause?

Having a big star like Dato' Siti present attracts people, but more importantly, she helps to de-stigmatise, demystify and get people interested in the cause. In the last few years, the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) has attracted artists such as Fahrin Ahmad, Dayang Norfaezah and Faizal Tahir to be part of our Red Ribbon Celebrities programme, which put in a lot of time and effort to raise funds and awareness.

What is the current condition of HIV/AIDS education and awareness?

Efforts need to be continued by the new generation. The issue is the lack of awareness of HIV/AIDS. A majority of Malaysians think HIV is untreatable or a death sentence, whereas elsewhere in the world, there are people who go on treatment and go back to a normal, healthy life.

What are the challenges faced in treating the HIV/AIDS epidemic?

HIV in Malaysia mostly affects marginalised individuals and groups, so the implementation of good prevention and treatment is full of challenges, leaving us with not enough funding. Another challenge would be the lack of capacity and human resources, from the professional level to the NGO level.

How much progress has Malaysia seen in terms of treatment programmes and policies?

I think Malaysia can be proud of the fact that in this region, it is one of the countries to make antiretroviral therapy available and funded by the government for people. However, we are lagging a lot behind countries like Cambodia and Africa, where

the percentage of people who need treatment actually are in treatment.

As Chairman of the Malaysian AIDS Foundation, what would you regard as a milestone in fighting AIDS?

The harm-reduction programme, which Malaysia had long refused. It was a proud moment when we presented the programme, implemented it and received millions of Ringgit from the Global Fund. In this regard, Malaysia was looked upon as a role model and, as a form of recognition, has been selected to host the International AIDS Society Conference, which I'll be hosting this July.

What are your personal gains and fulfilment throughout your career?

I get to travel the world, meet people like Liza Minelli and Bill Clinton, and co-chair a conference

and be on first-name basis with Dr Françoise Barré-Sinoussi, a Nobel Prize winner. On the other side of the coin, I got to meet people who are truly affected by the virus, and witness a whole spectrum of life. It has enriched my life and my family's life.

What do you hope to essentially accomplish on your career path?

To make a difference to individuals, families and the HIV epidemic. The world is talking about ending AIDS. I don't think I'll see that in my lifetime, but hopefully what little we do can contribute towards that goal. It requires a lot but I think every little bit counts. **H**

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