



People living with obesity often feel stigmatised, says Prince Court Medical Centre consultant endocrinologist Dr Malaika Karupiah. Picture credit: S. ONG

## A health issue

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

While diet and lifestyle are indeed the foundations of obesity management, when one is dealing with moderate to severe obesity, such as a BMI of over 30, it becomes very difficult to manage with lifestyle changes alone.

### SHAME AND STIGMA

People living with obesity often feel stigmatised, says Prince Court Medical Centre consultant endocrinologist Dr Malaika Karupiah.

They fear being judged so it's important to create a conducive environment and approach the issue with compassion and dignity.

We need to help patients understand that obesity is a disease and it



The 'My Best Me' campaign aims to empower people living with obesity to better understand the science behind obesity and take steps towards improved health management. Picture credit: S. ONG

left unaddressed, it will lead to serious medical complications.

For the patient, addressing obesity requires a good support system, whether a spouse or family member or a parent, if the patient is a child or adolescent.

I really appreciate it when patients come with a support system, but they must come willingly.

It's important that they feel motivated and empowered to address the issue, rather than feeling forced.

As much as we're saying that obesity is a chronic disease, it has multiple components, she adds.

It involves physical health, mental health and emotional well-being.

Addressing the mental health aspect is especially important.

One thing I always emphasize to my patients is that they're here for a health issue. We shouldn't look at it as just a matter of appearance.

### TREATMENT AND RELAPSE

Dr Bishara says what's unique about obesity treatment is that many people try to manage it on their own, without seeking professional help and they fail.

Even when they come to weight management clinics, 50 per cent drop out.

They feel the burden is entirely on them. When hunger strikes, they feel overwhelmed and ashamed. They



We have a broader clinical toolkit today that offers far more than what was available a decade ago. We're no longer limited to lifestyle and physical activity, says Universiti Malaysia Medical Centre professor of medicine and Universiti Malaysia Medical Centre department of research, development and innovation head Professor Dr Lee-Ling Lim. Picture credit: S. ONG

internalise it as a personal failure and don't return.

Dietary modification and physical activity serve as the foundations of obesity care, says Universiti Malaysia professor of medicine and Universiti Malaysia Medical Centre department of research, development and innovation head Professor Dr Lee-Ling Lim.

This applies across the spectrum, whether someone has mild or severe obesity.

However, we're fortunate to be living in an era where we now have more tools to tackle obesity, says Dr Lim.

Ten years ago, the options were very limited. It was either a diabetes prevention programme or dietary modification.

But now, we understand another critical factor — metabolic adaptation, says Dr Lim.

After any weight loss intervention, the body undergoes physiological

## MANAGING OBESITY

OBESITY has become one of the most pressing public health challenges in Malaysia.

The 2023 National Health and Morbidity Survey revealed that 54.4 per cent of Malaysian adults were either overweight or obese, marking a sharp and troubling rise of 22 per cent since 2011.

This is a wake-up call that underscores the urgent need for collective action, says Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad.

The National Health Screening Initiative (NHSI) further illustrates the scale of this challenge.

This year, more than 1.2 million adults were screened, and the findings are striking — over 254,000 were identified as obese (30.9 per cent), with a similar proportion overweight (30.8 per cent).

People living with obesity face a much higher risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, stroke and cancer. In Malaysia, these conditions together

account for over 70 per cent of all deaths, says Dr Dzulkefly.

Beyond the human toll, the economic impact is immense, costing the nation more than RM64 billion annually through healthcare spending, productivity losses and premature mortality.

This is why early detection and intervention are critical, he stresses, not only to reduce the risk of chronic disease and lower long-term healthcare costs, but also to change the trajectory of this public health challenge.

Another reality we cannot ignore is stigma, he adds.

Too often, people living with obesity are unfairly judged as lacking willpower, rather than recognised as facing a genuine health condition. This compounds the burden of disease with shame and discrimination.

To make progress, we must shift the narrative from blame to understanding, and from judgment to support, ensuring that those affected receive accurate information, timely

care, and compassion.

For many years, efforts to combat obesity have focused primarily on non-pharmacological approaches, such as promoting healthy diets, increasing physical activity, and strengthening behavioural support.

Dr Dzulkefly says while these remain essential, we are now shifting towards a more integrated approach — one that also includes pharmacological treatment and, where appropriate, surgical options to effectively manage obesity as a chronic condition in line with the Clinical Practice Guidelines on Obesity 2023.

Currently, the Health Ministry is establishing integrated clinical obesity management at the primary healthcare level, starting with ten health clinics and expanding in phases.

This will be supported by structured referral pathways, multidisciplinary teams and trained staff.

### CRITICAL STAGE

- Half of our population is either overweight or obese.
- Obesity alone accounts for approximately one in three adults (based on the standard evaluation criteria of a BMI of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>).
- If the Asian cut-off point (BMI threshold of 27.5 kg/m<sup>2</sup>) is applied, one in three Malaysian adults would be classified as obese.
- According to projections by the World Obesity Federation, by 2030, nearly half of our adult population could be obese, not just overweight.

### CREATING AWARENESS

ZUBILIS Pharma has launched a national obesity awareness campaign, called "My Best Me", which aims to empower people living with obesity to better understand the science behind obesity and take proactive steps toward improved health management.

The campaign will explore partnerships with government agencies, advocacy and community groups, healthcare professionals, key opinion leaders and influencers to drive awareness of the importance of managing obesity as a disease.

The campaign will also involve engagement initiatives at clinics, hospitals, retail partners, and pharmacies across the country.

changes that can lead to a plateau or reduced response over time.

This is often misunderstood, and people with obesity are unfairly blamed for "failing" weight loss efforts. But it's not a personal failure — it's a biological process.

For example, lifestyle interventions typically result in a maximum weight loss of around 5 per cent.

But if someone has a BMI of over 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, is that five per cent enough to prevent further comorbidities? asks Dr Lim.

It is and that's the reason why we need more, she says.

Today, we have a broader clinical toolkit — including medications and surgical interventions — that offers far more than what was available a decade ago. We're no longer limited to just lifestyle and physical activity.

We now understand that treatment must be multidisciplinary and personalised, combining lifestyle modification, pharmacotherapy and surgical options. It ultimately sets the stage for better management of obesity, she adds.

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# MMA urges increased healthcare spending in Budget 2026

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Public healthcare spending should be raised from 2.4% to 5% of gross domestic product (GDP) in Budget 2026 as a long-term investment in the nation's health system, says the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA).

Its president Datuk Dr Thirunavukarasu Rajoo said to fund healthcare financing. MMA proposed removing the sugar subsidy and expanding the tax on sugary drinks, with revenues ringfenced for the Health Ministry's use.

"This not only discourages unhealthy consumption but also channels resources directly into

strengthening healthcare," he said in a statement yesterday, Bernama reported.

Dr Thirunavukarasu said that for Budget 2026, priority should be in addressing the severe shortages and retention issues in the public healthcare workforce, because even the best policies cannot be delivered effectively without a strong workforce.

He said the association also welcomed the government's commitment to abolish the contract doctor system and urged that all remaining contract doctors be absorbed into permanent positions.

Dr Thirunavukarasu said great-

er support should also be given to postgraduate training through both the master's and parallel pathways.

He urged the government to look into the doctors' on-call allowances, which remained outdated at RM9.16 per hour.

The MMA also proposed the setting up of a national dashboard to map healthcare workers and services nationwide to ensure transparency and equitable distribution of resources.

Apart from that, Dr Thirunavukarasu said MMA called for stronger non-communicable diseases (NCDs) prevention via screen-

ings at private clinics, outsourcing national health checks and increasing mental health support.

He said to reduce health risks, MMA recommends clearer food labelling, tax relief for healthy lifestyles and boosting the Madani Medical Scheme to RM150mil.

He said MMA also suggested that digitalisation be made a cornerstone of healthcare reform, including the standardisation of patient ID stickers nationwide to reduce errors, while the MySejahtera app should be enhanced to serve as a platform to map participating private general practitioners' clinics.

Besides workforce, NCD and digitalisation concerns, Dr Thirunavukarasu said Budget 2026, to be tabled on Oct 10, must start preparing for elderly care, as its cost is projected to reach RM21bil or 1.08% of the GDP by 2040.

"We urge greater investment in home care services to keep seniors healthy within their communities, reducing unnecessary hospital admissions.

"We need more geriatricians, palliative care specialists and allied health professionals, while hospitals and clinics should be upgraded with age-friendly facilities," he said.

# Heart health insights from docs

## Audience of 200 learn role of genetics, monitoring devices, diet and exercise

By SHEILA SRI PRIYA

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ABOUT 30% of cholesterol produced by the body is due to one's lifestyle, a cardiologist says.

Cardiac Vascular Sentral Kuala Lumpur (CVSKL) consultant cardiologist Dr Suren Thuraisingham said the rest was influenced by genetics.

"When you have high bad cholesterol, which is low-density lipoprotein (LDL), it has to be treated," he said, adding that exercise alone had minimal effect on bad cholesterol.

Dr Suren, who has decades of experience in interventional cardiology, was one of three speakers at the "StarLIVE: Take Charge of Your Heart" event at Menara Star in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, in conjunction with World Heart Day.

The Saturday event was a collaboration between Star Media Group and CVSKL.

In his talk titled "Living Life #Unblocked: Cholesterol Explained", Dr Suren advised the public to avoid trans fats and encouraged individuals with family history of heart conditions to undergo cardiovascular risk profiling.

"Adopt a sensible diet," he said, also remarking that the majority of medical-related information on social media – sometimes by self-proclaimed experts – was inaccurate.

"These pieces of medical advice are not backed by proper medical studies," he said, urging the public to be cautious when consuming unverified healthcare information.

Other speakers at the event were CVSKL



'The StarLIVE: Take Charge of Your Heart' attendees getting free health checks during the event at Menara Star in Petaling Jaya. — AZLINA ABDULLAH/The Star

consultant cardiologist and electrophysiologist Datuk Dr Razali Omar and consultant cardiologist Datuk Dr David Chew Soon Ping.

On the topic "Heart Failure Has No Age: Why More Young Adults Are Affected", Dr Chew said patients who suffered from heart failure conditions should only engage in mild forms of exercise, with walking being a recommended option.

"Three to four hours of mild exercise weekly, such as walking, is encouraged," he said.

"Managing blood pressure, diabetes and

weight is also crucial for heart patients," he added.

Dr Chew explained that not all heart attacks were fatal, but some resulted in heart failure and atrial fibrillation which could lead to shortness of breath.

Meanwhile, Dr Razali discussed the benefits of smartwatches and mobile electrocardiogram (ECG) devices in detecting irregular heartbeats.

"These devices can help people monitor and record irregular heart rate episodes and alert them when needed.

"This information can then be brought

to doctors for further assessment.

"They are also useful for post-procedure monitoring," he said during his talk on "A Fluttering Heart and the Hidden Stroke Risk".

He added that some smartwatches were capable of detecting atrial fibrillation, an irregular and often rapid heart rhythm which could increase the risk of stroke.

About 200 people attended the talk.

Attendee Selvakumaran Muthusamy, 52, shared that some of his peers who were active in sports had died from heart attacks.

"This event was insightful. We learned that genetics play a large role, while lifestyle has a lesser impact on cholesterol levels," he said.

Margret Lim, 87, said she attended the talk to stay updated on cardiovascular health.

"I was a nurse and used to run full marathons up to the age of 60.

"I make time to attend talks like this to stay informed," she said.

Ng Leong, 74, gave the event a thumbs-up, calling it eye-opening.

"I have learned that I need to monitor my bad cholesterol and take action to prevent cardiovascular diseases," he said.

Adriene Teh, who cares for her 90-year-old mother, also found the session valuable, saying: "What's important is being aware of early warning signs like irregular heartbeat."

All attendees received RM50 health scan vouchers, while a lucky draw gave away two RM799 health screening vouchers from HealthScan Malaysia, CVSKL's dedicated screening centre.



Above: Visitors getting their blood pressure checked at Watsons' Heart Health Workshop in Kuala Lumpur.

Left: Ili (centre) talks about her heart attack experience. With her are Dr Faizal (right) and emcee Xiao Qian. — Photos: LOW LAY PHON/The Star

## Wake-up calls and subtle symptoms of cardiac distress

By FARID WAHAB

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**BUSINESS** owner and TV personality Ili Sulaiman was 37 when she suffered a minor heart attack, causing her to be hospitalised for days and homebound for months during recovery.

In the weeks leading up to the episode, the mother-of-one recalled experiencing fatigue, headaches and nausea, among other symptoms.

She also reported having occasional acid reflux in addition to rashes, which she attributed to her packed schedule.

"Despite sleeping for up to 12 hours sometimes, I was always tired. I thought maybe it was because I was working too hard."

"One day, I went to the hospital for a check-up. Within 10 minutes, I was told that I needed to be hospitalised for treat-

ment," she said during a survivor sharing session at the Heart Health Workshop under the "Watsons Jom Sihat" umbrella.

Ili attributed her health situation to poor diet and a lack of exercise, prompting her to course-correct.

What helped, she said, was keeping a journal in which she recorded her diet and daily routine.

"I made notes of how I felt each morning and how the food I ate and people around me influenced my stress levels.

"That allowed me to adjust my routine and diet, and I began prioritising self-care more," she said.

Ili also advised the audience to get medical check-ups regularly.

"A healthy life starts with you. Prevention is far better than waiting for a crisis."

"Listen to your body. The signs are there, we just need to pay attention."

Some 200 Watsons members attended the Kuala Lumpur event which featured booths by brands selling lifestyle and beauty products, as well as a counter for general health check-ups.

There was also a seminar by Pantai Hospital Kuala Lumpur consultant cardiologist Dr Faizal Khan.

During his session, Dr Faizal explained common symptoms of heart problems which included chest pain, shortness of breath, irregular heartbeat and dizziness.

He highlighted that women might experience more subtle symptoms such as fatigue, indigestion and back pain.

"These may be mistaken for less serious issues, which is why heart problems in women are often overlooked," he added.

Dr Faizal recommended individuals under the age of 40 have their blood pressure checked at least once every two years, while those over 40 should

do so annually.

To keep blood pressure and cholesterol levels under control, he advised against excessive alcohol consumption and smoking.

In terms of treatment, Dr Faizal said patients were usually encouraged to adopt lifestyle changes, such as exercising regularly and improving their diet, before turning to medication.

He added that increasing the intake of vegetables and fruits, while reducing salt and sugar consumption, could significantly lower the risk of heart problems.

The recommended daily salt intake was no more than 5g, he said, while limits for sugar were 36g (nine teaspoons) for men and 25g (six teaspoons) for women.

The cardiologist cautioned that foods generally considered healthy, such as cheese or meat, might become unhealthy when combined in one meal.

# Private hospitals poised for steady growth

## Bed expansion and medical tourism set to lift earnings

### HEALTHCARE

**PETALING JAYA:** Malaysia's private healthcare sector has room for organic growth despite the challenges posed by the regulatory landscape in the country.

CIMB Research in a report said the growth prospects for private healthcare services are underpinned by the growing number of non-communicable diseases and an ageing demographic.

The research house forecasts private hospital bed capacity in Malaysia to grow at a compounded annual growth rate of 4% to 5% between 2023 and 2028, supported by multiple expansion projects currently underway or planned.

"This is against a backdrop of Malaysia's hospital beds per 1,000 population at just 2.0, below the 2.5 average benchmark of developed markets.

"Within our coverage, KPJ Healthcare Bhd and IHH Healthcare Bhd are respectively aiming to expand bed capacity by 53% and 43% (bringing total bed capacity to 6,000 and 4,978) by 2029 and 2028, positioning them well to capture incremental demand," it explained.

CIMB Research noted total Malaysian private hospital bed capacity as of 2023 stood at around 18,779 beds and is anticipated to increase to between 23,000 and

**"Within our coverage, KPJ Healthcare Bhd and IHH Healthcare Bhd are respectively aiming to expand bed capacity by 53% and 43% (bringing total bed capacity to 6,000 and 4,978) by 2029 and 2028, positioning them well to capture incremental demand."**

CIMB Research

24,000 beds by 2028 as new hospital facilities are commissioned and existing ones expanded.

Another factor to drive growth will be healthcare tourism (HT).

Malaysia welcomed 1.6 million healthcare travellers in 2024 (up 14% year-on-year), with Indonesians accounting for 70% to 80% of revenue.

Malaysia is targeting over 4.3 million and 4.7 million tourist arrivals from Indonesia in 2025 and 2026, respectively, in conjunction with Malaysia Year of Medical Tourism 2026.

"Private hospital players with HT exposure are poised to benefit from the campaigns.

"Furthermore, we note that HT revenue accounted for 6% and 12% of KPJ's and IHH's Malaysia revenue in the second quarter of financial year 2025 respectively, marking a steady increase as both companies have been focusing on attracting medical tourists via collaboration with foreign referral centres and setting up dedicated flagship medical centres," it noted.

CIMB Research added the rollout of the diagnosis-related group framework at private hospitals has been postponed to 2027 to allow the new government health insurance product under the National Health Insurance Scheme to be rolled out first.

# Big, bold truth about obesity in Malaysia



We assume that a person is obese because they lack willpower where food is concerned.

PICTURE: OREN FRUMKIN / GETTY IMAGES

FOR the longest time, obesity has been portrayed as a lifestyle choice.

We assume that a person is obese because they lack willpower where food is concerned. It's a notion many people still cling to.

This leads to disdain toward people with obesity and becomes a hurdle in managing this condition.

But is it all just about food and lack of self-control? Is it a lifestyle choice people willingly make for themselves?

Obesity is a chronic, relapsing disease, and it's good that more awareness is being created around this, says Malaysian Obesity Society president and Hospital Al-Sultan Abdullah, Universiti Teknologi MARA consultant endocrinologist Professor Dr Rohana Abdul Ghani.

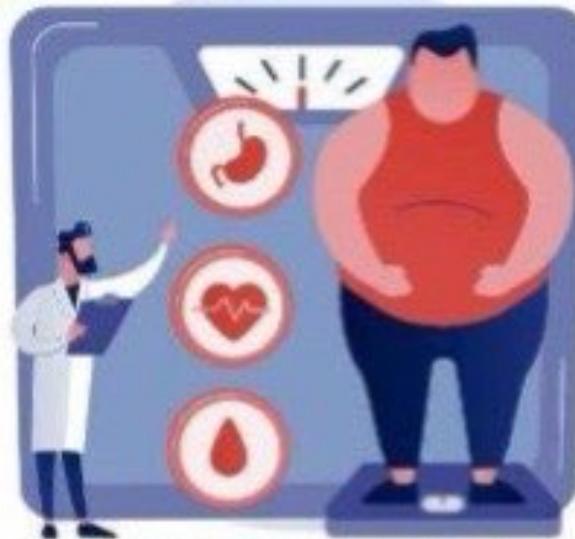
Like any other disease, it has symptoms like hunger pangs, and there's a science behind it, she explains.

It has a cause. It's a condition of excess adiposity, or excess fatty tissue.

It is also progressive in nature and leads to complications — more than 200 comorbidities and related health issues.

"For some one to view obesity purely as a lifestyle choice or a moral failure, or just poor decisions around food and physical activity, is a misunderstanding," stresses Dr Rohana.

Obesity has underlying causes, she



Obesity is progressive in nature and leads to complications. PICTURE: ERICK LAM / THE STAR

go beyond that view.

"We need to recognise that obesity is the disease, and these other conditions are complications of it."

Obesity is also treatable, she says. That's another reason why it should be classified as a disease — but treatment may not be effective through diet and lifestyle changes alone.



Obesity is a chronic, relapsing disease and it's good that more awareness is being created about this, says Malaysian Obesity Society president and Hospital Al-Sultan Abdullah, Universiti Teknologi MARA consultant endocrinologist Professor Dr Rohana Abdul Ghani. PICTURE: DAKSHIKA MUTHUSSU

adds. There are genetic factors at play, and it's influenced by the environment we live in — what experts call obesogenic environments.

The combination of these factors triggers complex genetic mechanisms that modify our biological makeup — and it's very complicated, says Dr Rohana.

Hormones also play a significant role. There are gut hormones and brain

hormones and there's a complex interplay happening behind the scenes. Yet, the public narrative often oversimplifies obesity to just "diet and lifestyle". Dr Rohana says it's time we changed the narrative surrounding obesity.

Instead of viewing obesity merely as a risk factor for non-communicable diseases like diabetes, hypertension and hyperlipidaemia, we need to

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# The 70-20-10 rule: Simple path to financial health

The sun 6/10/2025 MS/11

**COMMENT**  
By Dr Lee Chee Loong

IN the years following the Covid-19 pandemic, Malaysians have become more aware of life's uncertainties. Many have taken steps to strengthen their safety nets – they start reviewing insurance policies, building emergency funds or seeking professional financial advice.

This growing interest in risk management is a positive trend. However, it also brings a hidden challenge: in the quest to protect our future, some may unknowingly overspend on insurance, stretching their budgets too thin and compromising other important financial goals.

Insurance in itself is valuable; it acts as a vital safeguard against life's uncertainties. As the saying goes, "Fortune knocks but once but misfortune has much more patience". Appropriate coverage can indeed shield a family. That said, insurance must align with an individual's financial capacity, family responsibilities and risk exposure. The needs of a young adult earning RM 3,000 monthly differ vastly from those of a mid-career professional who is supporting his/her children and ageing parents.

Admittedly, professional financial planning services come at a cost and may not be everyone's first choice. For the broader public, a simple rule of



Just like maintaining good physical health, safeguarding our financial health requires balance, discipline and regular check-ups. – SYED AZAHAR SYED OSMAN/THESUN

thumb can safeguard financial health to avoid overspending: by following the "70-20-10 rule". The "70-20-10 saving rule" is a simple budgeting framework that helps individuals manage their income effectively by dividing it into three categories:

- ① 70% of income for essentials (housing, food, utilities);
- ② 20% for savings and future goals

(emergency fund, education, retirement);

③ 10% for risk protection (insurance).

That 10% allocation for insurance is your protective boundary. If you are encouraged to commit far more than this, especially at the expense of your savings or daily needs, it is a sign to pause and reconsider. Risk protection is vital but it should never come at the

cost of your financial stability.

The benefits of the "70-20-10 rule" are its simplicity and flexibility. It encourages a healthy balance between meeting present needs, preparing for the future, and enjoying life today. Over time, following this rule helps people avoid overspending, reduce financial stress and steadily build wealth.

Just like maintaining good physical health, safeguarding our financial health requires balance, discipline and regular check-ups. Financial health is not just about having insurance; it is about ensuring that all aspects of your money life are in harmony: manageable debt, adequate savings, protection against risks and the capacity to invest for the future.

Neglecting this balance can create long-term strain, even if your intentions are good.

When your financial health is strong, you gain more than just peace of mind. You are better equipped to weather economic downturns, handle unexpected expenses without panic and make life decisions, like starting a family, switching careers or retiring without being trapped by financial stress. Most importantly, you can protect your loved ones without sacrificing your own stability.

At its heart, sustainable safeguarding means protecting your future in a way that does not weaken your present. Insurance is just one tool in your financial toolkit. By maintaining balance and following a structured approach like the "70-20-10 rule", you can ensure that your financial health remains strong for the long run, no matter what uncertainties life brings.

**Dr Lee Chee Loong** is a member of the Active Ageing Impact Lab and a senior lecturer at Taylor's University. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

**H**EAD and neck cancers, while often overshadowed by other types of cancer, could have a profound impact on patients' lives. They not only threaten survival but also challenge the patient's self-identity, dignity and the ability to communicate with others. The loss of speech, ability to swallow, changes to taste of food or even changes to facial features can deeply affect how individuals see themselves and how they connect with others socially.

In Malaysia, head and neck cancers make up around 6% of all newly diagnosed cases and 8% of cancer-related deaths. Among men, nasopharyngeal cancer, which develops behind the nose and above the soft palate, is the fifth most common, with over 1,600 cases reported in 2022. Although less common in women, (1.5% of all female cancers), the impact of these cancers extends far beyond statistics.

Cancer care goes far beyond removing or controlling the tumour. The real goal apart from cure from cancer is restoring the patient's dignity and improving quality of life, ensuring they can communicate effectively, consume food and feel confident in themselves again.

#### Understanding head, neck cancers

Head and neck cancer refers to a group of cancers that begin in areas such as the mouth, throat, voice box, nose, sinuses and salivary glands. In Malaysia, nasopharyngeal cancer is most common and other head and neck cancers include those of the oral cavity, larynx and oropharynx (back

# Restoring voice, dignity for head, neck cancer patients

► How holistic care, modern therapies can help patients reclaim identity, confidence, hope

of the throat, tonsils and base of the tongue) cancers.

Nasopharyngeal cancer is far more common in Malaysia and neighbouring countries than in the West, where it is relatively rare. Contributing factors include Epstein-Barr virus infections, family history, diets high in preserved foods such as salted fish, and lifestyle habits such as smoking, alcohol consumption and betel quid chewing. Additionally, infections such as human papillomavirus (HPV) are associated with cancers of the oral cavity and oropharynx.

HPV-associated head and neck cancers are increasingly recognised, particularly among younger, non-smoking individuals. These cancers may present with symptoms such as a persistent sore throat, ear pain, difficulty swallowing, hoarseness or a neck lump (swollen or enlarged lymph node).

#### More than medical diagnosis

For patients, the diagnosis of head and neck cancers goes beyond medical treatment. It affects everyday activities that most take for granted, such as speaking, eating, swallowing and even breathing. Losing the ability to enjoy meals, converse with loved ones or participate socially can cause patients to withdraw and feel isolated, and in some cases, struggle to continue working.

The effects can be very profound. Many patients feel as though they have lost part of their identity, especially if they can no longer speak clearly or enjoy food as before. This loss often leads to embarrassment, social withdrawal or even depression. It can also place strain on family relationships, although many families rise to the occasion and rally together to provide much-needed support.

These emotional burdens highlight the importance of holistic care that goes beyond tumour removal. Cancer treatment is not only about survival, but also about supporting patients as they walk through their cancer journey, rediscover their sense of self and embrace the simple joys that give life meaning.

Small steps, such as being able to enjoy a meal with family or speak clearly again, play an enormous role in restoring a patient's confidence and sense of self and well-being.

The integration of emotional and social support, along with empowering patients and their families with treatment information, is equally vital. Families, peer support groups and survivor communities offer encouragement that can significantly influence recovery outcomes.

#### Breaking stigma, misconceptions

Despite medical advances, stigma surrounding head and neck cancers remains a major challenge. Some patients delay seeking treatment because they fear being judged or believe their diagnosis leaves little room for hope, while others worry that treatment will inevitably result in severe disfigurement or the permanent loss of vital functions such as speaking and swallowing.

In fact, modern therapies such as precision radiotherapy, chemo-immunotherapy and organ-preserving surgical techniques have advanced greatly, enabling many patients to keep their appearance, voice and ability to eat near to normality. Yet, these fears can understandably hold people back from seeking help, and when treatment is delayed, it can become less effective.

#### Advances in treatment: Precision, hope

In recent years, significant technological advances have transformed treatment for head and neck cancers. Techniques such as

intensity-modulated radiotherapy allow tumours to be targeted with precision while sparing healthy tissues such as salivary glands and hearing apparatus, resulting in fewer side effects such as dry mouth and hearing loss. In advanced cases, newer systemic therapies, including targeted drugs and immunotherapy, have improved survival rates and quality of life.

These advances not only give patients hope but also allow them to keep the ability to speak, eat and live more comfortably, things that are important for recovery and dignity.

HPV-associated head and neck cancers typically have a better prognosis and respond well to treatment - hence, aggressive and mutilating surgery should be avoided whenever possible.

#### Awareness, early action

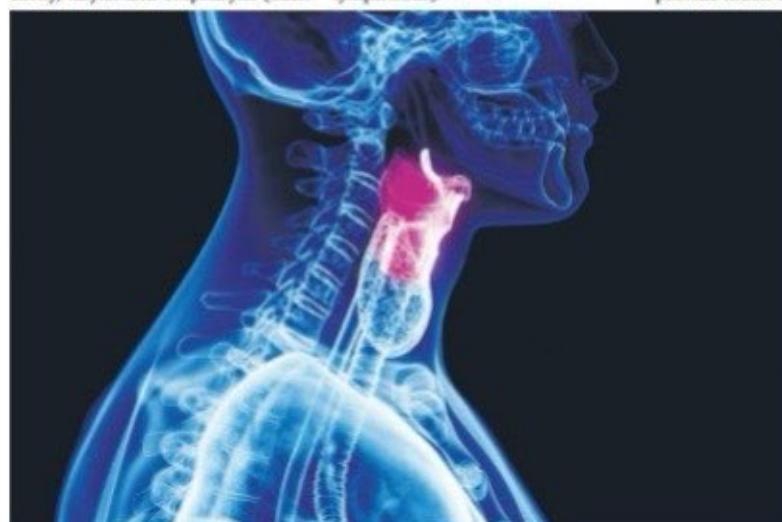
The lessons from survivors echo a vital message that cancer is not the end of the story. With timely diagnosis, advanced treatment and holistic care, patients can reclaim their lives.

Humanising cancer helps break the stigma and encourages more people to seek screening and treatment. Early detection saves lives and preserves dignity.

Younger adults are encouraged to receive the HPV vaccination, which significantly reduces the risk of HPV-associated head and neck cancers. It is also important to quit smoking, a major risk factor for non-HPV related head and neck cancers.

As Malaysia continues the fight against cancer, open conversations and community education are essential. Breaking the silence not only encourages patients to seek help earlier, but also builds a society where every journey is met with dignity, understanding and support.

*This article is contributed by  
OncCare Cancer Centre Malaysia  
consultant clinical oncologist  
Dr Ben Yap Beng Khiong.*



Neck cancers include those of the larynx.

# Aktiviti mandi sungai ukuran nilai tahap kebersihan

**Usaha wujudkan aktiviti rekreasi air tuntut komitmen semua pihak**

**Kuala Lumpur:** Sungai Klang berpotensi menjadi lokasi rekreasi termasuk untuk mandi jika usaha pemuliharaan dilakukan secara berterusan serta menyeluruh.

Presiden Sahabat Sungai Malaysia, Prof Datuk Seri Dr Zaini Ujang, berkata aktiviti mandi sungai bukan sekadar aktiviti riadah, tetapi boleh dijadikan ukuran baharu menilai tahap kebersihan sungai di negara ini.

"Dahulu, semasa kecil, orang kampung mandi di sungai setiap pagi dan petang. Sungai ketika itu menjadi keperluan asas. Kini sudah tiba masa kita kembali menjadikan aktiviti mandi sebagai penanda bersih sungai," katanya.

Zaini berkata demikian kepada pemberita selepas menjadi ahli panel Forum 'Bila Kita Boleh Mandi Sungai Klang?' anjuran Sahabat Sungai Malaysia dengan kerjasama Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) di sini semalam.

Penanda aras 'boleh atau tidak boleh mandi', menurut beliau lebih mudah difahami masyarakat berbanding pengelasan sungai berdasarkan petunjuk biokimia yang sering digunakan.

"Apabila kita kata sungai ini bersih atau tidak, rakyat mungkin sukar faham. Tapi bila ditanya boleh mandi atau tidak, ia lebih mudah difahami," katanya.

## Tangani pencemaran

Zaini berkata, usaha menjadikan Sungai Klang dan Sungai Langat sebagai sungai mesra rakyat yang bersih serta sesuai untuk aktiviti rekreasi air memerlukan komitmen dan kerjasama semua pihak.

"Untuk itu, kita perlu mengenal pasti punca pencemaran dan cara menanganinya dengan berkesan. Pada masa sama, usaha juga perlu dilakukan terhadap tebing sungai

supaya lebih menarik dan selamat untuk pengguna," katanya.

Beliau berkata, tanggungjawab menjaga sungai bermula dari rumah termasuk memastikan sistem saliran dan tangki septic diselenggara baik serta disambungkan kepada saluran pembetungan awam.

Selain itu, Zaini berkongsi pengalaman ke beberapa bandar utama di Eropah yang menjadikan aktiviti mandi sungai sebagai indikator tahap kebersihan air.

"Sungai yang bersih bukan sahaja memberi manfaat kepada penduduk tempatan malah berpotensi menjadi tarikan pelancongan.

"Apabila sungai kita bersih, orang akan datang bukan hanya untuk mandi, tetapi juga menikmati pemandangan dan merakam gambar," katanya. BERNAMA

 Kita perlu mengenal pasti punca pencemaran dan cara menanganinya dengan berkesan. Pada masa sama, usaha juga perlu dilakukan terhadap tebing sungai supaya lebih menarik dan selamat untuk pengguna 

**Zaini Ujang,**  
Presiden Sahabat Sungai Malaysia



# Boy drowns in irrigation canal

Thesun 6/10/2025 MS/5

**ALOR SETAR:** A 13-year-old boy drowned after slipping into an irrigation canal while fishing with friends at Kampung Alor Setol in Langgar on Saturday.

Kota Setar district police chief ACP Siti Nor Salawati Saad said

police received a call at 10am from a passerby reporting that an unconscious teenager had been found near the canal.

The boy, a student from a school in Pokok Sena, had reportedly lost his footing while walking along the canal bank,

and his friends were unable to rescue him, she said in a statement.

A medical assistant from the Sultanah Bahiyah Hospital confirmed his death at the scene, and the body was sent for post-mortem. – Bernama

# Audits on over 700 schools nationwide completed

**BUKIT MERTAJAM:** The Education Ministry has completed safety audits on more than 700 schools nationwide, said Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek.

She said the auditing process, which involves both primary and secondary schools, is ongoing and expected to be completed within the next two months.

"This effort is very important for us to ensure that schools receive special attention, particularly in terms of safety.

"The audit will help us identify key areas that require immediate improvement and guide us in developing long-term safety measures for the wellbeing of students and staff," she said after launching an anti-bullying campaign at Yayasan Aman in Penanti yesterday.

Fadhlina said the safety audit exercise, led by the School Inspectorate and Quality Assurance Division, was initiated following several incidents in schools and is aimed at identifying risks related to infrastructure, supervision and student welfare. Weekly progress reports are being submitted to ensure swift action on critical findings.

She said school safety is being addressed holistically under the ministry's Safe School Framework, which is among the proposals included in the Budget 2026 submission.

"Within this framework, we have requested consideration for a significant increase in the number of counselling teachers and for expanded access to mental health support programmes in schools.

"We hope the Safe School Framework will receive due attention in the upcoming Budget as part of our commitment to building a safer and more supportive learning environment," she said.

The Safe School Framework, announced earlier this year, outlines measures to address issues such as bullying, vandalism, infrastructure maintenance and psychological wellbeing through

► Initiative helps to identify key areas requiring immediate improvement and development of long-term measures for wellbeing of students and staff: Education minister



Fadhlina said school safety is being addressed holistically under the Safe School Framework, which is among the proposals included in the Budget 2026 submission. —ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THESUN

closer coordination between schools, parents and local authorities, Bernama reported.

Fadhlina said safety cannot be viewed solely from a physical standpoint but must also take into account emotional and psychological aspects, especially as students return to fully normalised schooling after the pandemic period.

On the recent tragedy involving a Year Four pupil who was found unconscious in a school restroom in Senawang, Negeri Sembilan, Fadhlina said the ministry is awaiting the outcome of police investigations and has extended full cooperation to the authorities.

"The investigation is ongoing and we are giving our full support to police. We hope the public will allow the authorities to complete their work without speculation," she said.

Negeri Sembilan police chief Datuk Alzafny Ahmad said investigators have recorded statements from 35 individuals including teachers, school staff, students, medical personnel and family members of the deceased.

He said a post-mortem carried out at the Rembau Hospital revealed pressure marks on the neck but no other external injuries.

The case is being investigated under Section 507C of the Penal

Code, relating to bullying and harassment.

The investigation papers are expected to be referred to the deputy public prosecutor once all findings are compiled.

Authorities have also urged the public to avoid spreading unverified information on social media.

The 10-year-old boy was found unconscious in the school toilet at about 1.15pm last Wednesday and was pronounced dead after being taken to a nearby private medical centre.

His family has asked for privacy and said they would leave the investigation to the authorities.