

Loneliness epidemic looms

Better support systems urged to curb isolation among seniors

By YUEN MEIKENG

meikeng@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia is ageing, and very fast.

By 2048, just 22 years from now, the country is projected to become an "aged nation" with 14% of the total population aged 65 and above. One in every five people would also be aged 60 and above, according to the Statistics Department.

With the rapid ageing will come another problem – a "loneliness epidemic".

That is when social isolation and alienation affect large groups of people, often with serious health and societal consequences, says Universiti Malaya demographer Dr Tey Nai Peng.

"This is often manifested in depression and cognitive decline and the prevalence of chronic diseases," he said.

With such an epidemic looming, better social support has to be put in place to care for the growing number of senior citizens. The current number of care centres is insufficient.

There are now 465 care centres registered nationwide, with 376 managed privately and the rest

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by NGOs.

Poor social support among older Malaysians also increased from 30.8% in 2018 to 33.1% last year, according to the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2025.

"Without stronger social infrastructure, we risk a 'loneliness epidemic' that could strain families, hospitals and the economy," the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry admitted.

Here's a point to ponder. Malaysia is ageing about 1.5 times faster than Japan.

The country is compressing a century of demographic change into just five to six decades, unlike Japan, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said in a report.

To offer better support, the ministry said the government

was promoting healthy, active ageing through Senior Citizens Activity Centres (PAWE).

"This is to help older Malaysians remain independent and engaged.

"As of December 2025, there are a total of 217 PAWEs nationwide.

"These centres enable older people to participate in activities and socialise with the community," the ministry said, adding that 47,020 older persons were currently registered with these centres.

Aside from expanding PAWE, Tey said other community-based spaces like Rukun Tetangga, residents' associations and places of worship should be strengthened.

"Such spaces can be transformed into elder-friendly support and care hubs.

"These spaces should go beyond basic activities by offering social programmes, inter-generational activities, fitness sessions, telehealth, mini-clinics and digital access to help older persons stay healthy, connected, and engaged," he said.

Tey, meanwhile, suggested that mobile PAWE units be set up to extend services to underserved

areas, while digital platforms can keep seniors connected through online classes and virtual activities.

"At the same time, old folk homes and care centres must be made more affordable and improved in both services and daily activities, ensuring that residents receive care with companionship rather than isolation," he added.

Tey said seniors themselves can also remain active through part-time work, mentoring, or voluntary work, ensuring they continue to contribute meaningfully to society.

Age-friendly environments – both social and physical – should also be strengthened, said Universiti Putra Malaysia's Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing research officer Chai Sen Tyng.

"An age-friendly social environment will enable older people to participate, feel included, remain connected, and maintain dignity and autonomy.

"It has a lot to do with ageism and ageist attitudes, be it for labour and employment, education and training to access health and social care services," he said.

Growing old at home, not in an institution

PETALING JAYA: Old folks homes can be a pain for seniors. Some are restrictive, and it may feel like being in a hospital or, worse, being in detention.

To offer a better quality of life for such seniors, the government is encouraging "ageing in place" – where older persons remain in their homes and communities but still get access to the support they need.

The Women, Family and Community Development Ministry is promoting ageing in place, supported by initiatives that foster a community-integrated system instead of a hospital-centric model.

"The Social Welfare Department (DSW) has set up Home Help Services throughout the country through smart partnerships with

NGOs to provide care for older persons living alone," the ministry said.

"DSW provides financial assistance of RM600 per month for older persons to help them remain with their families or communities."

Among the home help services provided are transporting the bedridden to hospitals or clinics for health treatment and assisting the older persons in personal hygiene.

As of December 2025, a total of 6,530 older persons have received this service offered by 2,152 volunteers nationwide.

Recently, the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2025 showed that a rising number of seniors were living alone – from 6.3% in 2018 to 18.8% last year.

This means that about one in every five senior citizens is living alone.

Nevertheless, 61.3% of those living alone reported high social support, which refers to help, care and connections they received from family, friends and the community.

The percentage of older people with depression also shrank from 11.2% in 2018 to 8% last year.

Universiti Malaya demographer Dr Tey Nai Peng said Malaysia can draw lessons from countries with larger older populations while also reflecting on its own successful initiatives.

He said we can learn from Australia's "ageing in place" policies, by strengthening our homecare and volunteer systems to support independence.

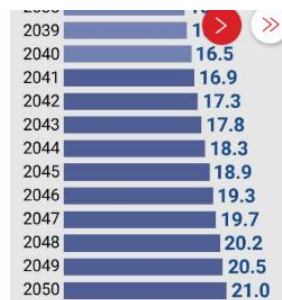
"We can also embrace technologies that support ageing in place.

"This includes expanding telehealth, monitoring with artificial intelligence, and smart home solutions to help seniors live independently, with family support," Tey added.

On the coming Senior Citizens Bill, the ministry said it is now in the stage of gathering and refining input from various stakeholders to ensure the proposed law meets the diverse needs and interests of older Malaysians.

Asked if the Bill will mandate adult children to provide for their aged parents' financial and physical needs as in countries like China and Singapore, the ministry said this is a subject of active debate among stakeholders.

"While mandating adult chil-



Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia TheStargraphics

dren's responsibility for elderly parents may seem ideal, we must also consider challenges such as the sandwich generation's burden, children's socio-economic conditions, and cases of past abuse.

"The government is still reviewing this matter," it said.

Penang strengthens disaster preparedness measures

By N. TRISHA
trishang@thestar.com.my

GEORGE TOWN: With the south-west monsoon expected to begin tomorrow, Penang has taken measures to strengthen weather monitoring, disaster response coordination and aid for vulnerable communities.

State environment committee chairman Sundarajoo Somu said measures would ensure the elderly, children and those with chronic diseases were protected during extreme weather, based on the Health Ministry's heat-wave guidelines.

"These guidelines outline the management of public health

risks associated with extreme heat or heatwaves, including a structured action plan triggered by specific temperature thresholds.

"From the preparation phase to emergency measures, high-risk groups will be identified and given priority," he said during the state assembly sitting yesterday.

According to the Malaysian Meteorological Department (MetMalaysia), the southwest monsoon is expected to persist until September, following consistent south-westerly winds.

During this time, lower humidity levels are expected to reduce cloud formation over most areas, resulting in fewer rainy days and

drier conditions nationwide.

Sundarajoo said measures included ensuring monthly El Nino updates and daily heat status reports reach high-risk groups.

He added that forecasts of at least seven consecutive days without rain would also be relayed daily to the Department of Environment and other relevant agencies.

"We will monitor forest fire risks through seven-day forecasts, as well as haze forecasts," he said.

Sundarajoo was responding to a written question from Muhammad Fauzi Yusoff (PN-Sungai Dua) on the state government's preparedness for the El Nino phenomenon and support for the B40 group

during such conditions.

He said vulnerable communities targeted under the heatwave and flood preparedness programmes included women, children, senior citizens, low-income residents and persons with disabilities.

"Financial assistance will be provided to all disaster victims regardless of socio-economic status through the Bantuan Wang Ihsan scheme," he said, adding that a sum of RM1,000 each will be given to affected households and RM10,000 to the next of kin of disaster fatalities.

On preparedness for storms and tornadoes, which have become more frequent,

Sundarajoo said the state government had enhanced its early warning system through the Penang Alert website and the Penang Island City Council's Disaster and Weather Monitoring Module under the Virtual Island of Penang initiative for real-time weather monitoring and storm detection.

"Various infrastructure maintenance works have also been carried out, including pruning high-risk trees, maintaining roads and bridges, and repairing temporary evacuation centres.

"An allocation of RM80,000 was provided last year to ensure the safety and welfare of the people remain protected," he added.

El Nino may cause spike in dengue

High temperatures will lead to faster mosquito breeding

By R. ANANTHINI
VETHASALAM
raga@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia may not only have to brace for drier weather, but also a heightened risk of dengue.

The Malaysian Meteorological Department (MetMalaysia) recently projected that the El Nino phenomenon would intensify from April to June and become increasingly dominant by August.

Prof Datuk Dr Azizan Abu Samah, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Ocean and Earth Sciences, said there is a 60% probability that the country would experience El Nino by year-end due to the north-east monsoon.

"Normally, the risk of Aedes breeding increases with higher temperatures. So during El Nino, especially around April, we will see a spike in Aedes mosquitoes," he said.

He added that puddles and higher temperatures create conducive conditions for mosquito breeding.

Prof Dr Mohd Hasni Jaafar, a medical lecturer at Universiti

"Higher temperatures may also shorten the incubation period ... allowing the mosquito to become infectious sooner and increasing the risk of disease transmission."

Prof Dr Mohd Hasni Jaafar

Kebangsaan Malaysia's Department of Community Health Medicine, said reduced rainfall during El Nino could lower dam and river water levels, contributing to water supply disruptions and shortages.

"As a result, many households



Eradicating mosquitoes: A Health Ministry contractor dispensing insecticide at a residential area in Seri Kembangan, Kuala Lumpur. — AZHAR MAHFUF/The Star

may store water in containers, drums and buckets. Without proper care and attention, these stored water containers can become ideal breeding sites for mosquitoes.

"In addition, although El Nino generally causes drier weather conditions, occasional short periods of heavy rainfall may still occur," he said.

Dr Mohd Hasni, who specialises in environmental toxicology, said rainwater is often collected in discarded containers, clogged drains and unused items around homes.

"These can create stagnant water sites that favour mosquito breeding, particularly Aedes," he said.

He added that reduced rainfall also decreases the natural "wash

away" effect of rainwater, which normally helps remove mosquito breeding habitats such as gutters and drains.

He said the risk of dengue outbreaks is heightened by higher temperatures, which may accelerate the mosquito life cycle, causing eggs to hatch faster and larvae to develop more rapidly into adult mosquitoes.

"Adult mosquitoes may bite more frequently in hot conditions. Higher temperatures may also shorten the incubation period of the dengue virus inside the mosquito, allowing the mosquito to become infectious sooner and increasing the risk of disease transmission," he said.

He urged the public to take precautions, including emptying and scrubbing water containers regu-

larly, covering water storage tanks and drums tightly, cleaning roof gutters and drains, and ensuring there is no stagnant water around homes and workplaces.

"Proper disposal of unused containers and rubbish that can collect rainwater is also important.

"Aedes mosquitoes are most active during the early morning and late afternoon.

"Wearing long-sleeved clothing, using mosquito repellents, installing window or door screens and using mosquito electric repellents appropriately may help reduce exposure to mosquito bites," he said.

He said early medical attention is also important to reduce the risk of severe dengue complications.

Good opportunity to learn about hantavirus

HEALTH Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad has confirmed that there were no Malaysians on board the *MV Hondius* (pic), where a hantavirus outbreak occurred, taking the lives of three passengers. Eight others were confirmed to be infected, and authorities in the affected countries are scrambling to trace those who might have been exposed in a bid to stop the virus from spreading.

While Dr Dzulkefly assured that the current risk to our country remains extremely low, << we should take this opportunity to understand this virus and the practical, human-focused steps we can take to prevent its spread.

Hantavirus is a broader family of viruses historically known to spread via aerosolised rodent droppings. The culprit behind the outbreak on the *MV Hondius* is the Andes virus, a strain native to South America.

Scientifically, the Andes virus is the only hantavirus confirmed to be capable of human-to-human transmission, which typically occurs through close and prolonged contact with an individual who is already showing severe symptoms.

This was documented extensively during a 2018-2019 outbreak in Argentina, where a single introduction of the virus led to 34 human-to-human infections.

Symptoms of the Andes hantavirus typically manifest one to eight weeks after exposure. It often begins with severe flu-like symptoms, including fever, chills, dizziness and intense muscle aches, before progressing to a severe condition known as han-



Photo: AFP

tavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS), which causes shortness of breath and fluid in the lungs.

It is also important to remind ourselves that Malaysia is not traversing unknown territory when it comes to managing infectious diseases or dealing with complex, emerging pathogens.

Our public health infrastructure was forged through the fires of the 1999 Nipah virus outbreak as well as our battles with severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the H1N1 influenza (swine flu). Today, the Health Ministry operates through the highly systematic Malaysia Strategic Workplan for Emerging Diseases (MySED) and the Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre (CPRC).

These established protocols ensure that our borders, international points of entry and health-care facilities maintain strict surveillance and rapid response capabilities.

We already have the laborato-

ry capacity to identify complex viruses, and the authorities are constantly monitoring global updates from the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Dr Gustavo Palacios, an infectious disease expert advising WHO, noted that the 2018 Andes outbreak in Argentina was successfully ended by using simple, highly effective public health measures.

The Andes virus requires close, prolonged contact to jump from one human to another. If you are interacting with someone exhibiting severe flu-like symptoms, especially if they have recently travelled internationally, maintain a safe physical distance.

As Dr Palacios stresses, the most fundamental way to break a chain of transmission is to simply stay at home when you are unwell. Isolating yourself at the first sign of fever or chills prevents the pathogen from circulating in workplaces, schools and public transport.

Limit close contact and fre-

quently use hand sanitiser or wash your hands with soap. Wearing face masks in crowded areas or when caring for a sick individual adds a crucial layer of protection against respiratory transmission.

If you are travelling to regions where the Andes virus is present (such as South America) or boarding international cruise ships, remain highly aware of your health. If you develop symptoms within one to eight weeks of returning, seek immediate medical care and proactively declare your travel history to your doctor.

The *MV Hondius* outbreak is a tragedy, but it is a contained one. By staying informed, we can easily protect our community from international viral threats.

DR RAFIDAH LANI
Senior lecturer
Department of Medical
Microbiology
Faculty of Medicine
Universiti Malaya

PM hails nurses for their dedication and life-long service

PETALING JAYA: Nurses deserve the nation's deepest appreciation on account of their sacrifice, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (pic).

"They are often the constant presence at every stage of one's life, from birth to a patient's final moment," he said in a Facebook post yesterday to mark the International Nurses Day.

Anwar singled out nurses for << their compassion, dedication and unwavering service in caring for patients and supporting families through moments of pain, fear and uncertainty.

"From the moment we are born, among the first people to

welcome and care for us are nurses.

"They are there when mothers endure the pain of childbirth, there to hear our first cries, caring for us when we fall ill, and continuing to faithfully serve and look after us until the end of our lives," he said.

Anwar said almost everyone has experienced the compassion and care of a nurse at some point in life.

"They comfort patients who are suffering, reassure frightened children, give strength to anxious families and, in many situations,



become the people who understand a patient's condition most closely.

"Their experience and attention to detail are also crucial in helping doctors provide the best possible treatment," he said.

Describing nursing as a noble profession, Anwar said it demanded sacrifice, inner strength, and extraordinary sincerity.

"Thank you for all your service and sacrifices. Happy International Nurses Day."

On another matter, Anwar also congratulated his friend and South Indian cinema icon,

Chandrasekaran Joseph Vijay, better known as Vijay, on becoming the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

He said for many years, fans had watched Vijay defeat corrupt politicians and villains within the span of a three-hour film.

"The people of Tamil Nadu have now entrusted Vijay with a responsibility far greater than any role performed on screen.

"Oru Viral Puratchi, or the 'one-finger revolution', is now on the cusp of creating history," he said, adding that Malaysia and Tamil Nadu share deep historical, cultural and people-to-people ties across generations.

"I look forward to working

closely with Chief Minister Vijay in the years ahead," he said.

In turn, Vijay, 52, thanked Anwar for his well wishes.

"Thank you for your gracious gesture. I am committed to fostering greater cooperation and enhancing the bond of friendship between Tamil Nadu and Malaysia," Vijay said in a post on X, where he added he is committed to building warmer ties with Malaysia.

Vijay was sworn in as the southern Indian state's chief minister on Sunday following his Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam party's victory in the assembly elections held in April.

Hantavirus is fatal with no cure

Hantavirus circulates in rodents and can be deadly when transmitted to humans. PIC FROM WIRESTOCK — MAGNIFIC.COM



HANTAVIRUS, recently linked to deaths on a cruise ship in the Atlantic Ocean, circulates in rodents and can be deadly when transmitted to humans.

Dutch cruise operator Oceanwide Expeditions confirmed recently it was dealing with "a serious medical situation" on board the MV 'Hondius', travelling from Argentina to Cape Verde.

Hantaviruses can cause respiratory and cardiac distress, as well as haemorrhagic fevers.

There are no vaccines or specific medications to combat hantaviruses — meaning treatment consists solely of attempting to relieve the symptoms.

THE VIRUS

Each hantavirus is associated with a specific rodent reservoir species, in which it can cause long-term infection without apparent illness.

Only a few hantavirus species are known to cause human disease.

The virus is named after the Hantan River in South Korea, where more than 3,000 troops fell seriously ill after becoming infected during the 1950-1953 Korean War, Switzerland's Federal Office of Public Health says.

Transmission of hantaviruses to humans occurs from contact with contaminated urine, droppings or saliva of infected wild rodents, such as mice or rats. More rarely, infection may occur through bites.

The French National Public Health Agency says human infection gener-

ally occurs through inhalation of contaminated dust and aerosols.

The only way to minimise the risk is to avoid contact with rodents and their secretions and excretions.

The Andes virus, found in South America, is the only known hantavirus for which limited human-to-human transmission has been documented and only then linked to "close and prolonged contact", says the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The WHO's epidemic preparedness chief Maria Van Kerkhove says based on previous outbreaks, "the overall risk to the public is low".

DIAGNOSIS

The WHO says early diagnosis "can be challenging" as symptoms resemble other respiratory illnesses,

such as Covid-19.

Suspected cases can be confirmed through various laboratory tests, according to the WHO, including through "the presence of hantavirus-specific IgM antibodies".

Van Kerkhove says the WHO is working to understand the source of exposure through epidemiological investigations, along with contact tracing and lab tests.

"In the Americas, infection has been known to lead to hantavirus cardiopulmonary syndrome (HCPS), a rapidly progressive condition affecting the lungs and heart, while in Europe and Asia, hantaviruses has been linked to haemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS), which primarily affects the kidneys and blood vessels," says the WHO.

Different health authorities give varying time periods between exposure and symptom manifestation.

According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in the Americas, symptoms usually start to show one to eight weeks after contact, while HFRS symptoms usually develop within one to two weeks.

Early symptoms typically include fever, headache, muscle aches, abdominal pain, nausea or vomiting.

In HCPS, the disease may progress rapidly to cough, shortness of breath, accumulation of fluid in the lungs and shock, says the WHO.

In HFRS, later stages may include low blood pressure, bleeding disorders and kidney failure.

The virus is named after the Hantan River in South Korea, where more than 3,000 troops fell seriously ill after becoming infected during the 1950-1953 Korean War.



An ambulance boat carrying crew members in hazmat suits approaching the cruise ship MV 'Hondius' near the port of Praia in the capital of Cape Verde recently. AFP PIC



CASE NUMBERS, FATALITY RATE

Worldwide, it is estimated that from 10,000 to over 100,000 infections occur each year, with the largest burden in Asia and Europe, says the WHO.

HFRS accounts for many thousands of cases annually in East Asia, particularly in China and South Korea.

The case fatality rate is between less than one per cent to 15 per cent in Asia and Europe, the WHO says.

Despite the much lower incidence, HCPS has a case fatality rate commonly between 20 and 40 per cent, says the WHO, making it a disease of major public health concern.

'Empowered nurses key to stronger healthcare delivery'

Henrietta Liza

KUCHING: Empowering nurses remains vital in strengthening the healthcare delivery system and improving patient outcomes, said Normah Medical Specialist Centre (NMSC) nursing director Nadzrah Basri.

Speaking at the International Nurses Day 2026 celebration themed 'Our Nurses. Our Future. Empowered Nurses Save Lives', at the centre here yesterday, she said the theme highlighted the importance of empowering nurses to deliver the best possible care to patients.

"This year's theme carries a very meaningful message as it reminds us that nurses must be empowered in order to deliver the best possible care to patients," she said.

Nadzrah said the centre's continuous efforts in post-basic training, clinical competency development, implementation of the Early Warning Score (EWS), patient safety programmes and accreditation preparations were important investments in strengthening the nursing



Members of the nursing team and guests pose for a group photo during the International Nurses Day 2026 celebration.

workforce.

"Empowered nurses advocate for patient safety, carry out their duties with confidence and professionalism, mentor

colleagues and embrace lifelong learning.

"When nurses are empowered, healthcare becomes safer, more efficient and more

compassionate, and lives can be saved," she added.

Meanwhile, NMSC chief operating officer Vesmawati Jaffar said the hospital

management is committed to supporting nurses through continuous professional development and organisational improvements to ensure high-quality healthcare services.

She said nurses play a vital role in every patient's journey by providing compassion and dedicated care regardless of the challenges faced.

"The role of nurses is not only to save lives, but also to bring comfort, hope and strength to patients and their families. Your resilience and commitment are an inspiration to the entire healthcare community," she said.

Vesmawati also expressed gratitude to Deputy Nursing director Norashidah Md Rabu, Nadzrah and all nurses for their professionalism and compassionate service.

The celebration also honoured nurses from various departments, including inpatient wards, critical care units, outpatient services and specialised clinical fields.

As part of the International Nurses Day 2026 celebration, the NMSC nursing team participated in the Telaga Air Community Programme in collaboration with

Bank Simpanan Nasional (BSN) on May 9, and will also take part in the Association of Wives of Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Sarawak's 'Know Your Health Risk Factors' programme on tomorrow (May 14), as well as the International Nursing Student Conference at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak from May 16 to 17.

Other activities include the Kuching North City Commission Car-Free Day on May 17, and the State Legislative Assembly engagement programme from May 18 to 20.

Through these initiatives, nurses are extending healthcare services beyond the hospital by providing cardiopulmonary resuscitation education and basic health screenings, including blood pressure and blood glucose checks.

Among those present at the event were NMSC Corporate Business and Corporate Affairs head Alina Sadiyah Ibrahim, Human Resources head Siti Rahimah Abdul Rahman, and Corporate Business and Corporate Affairs deputy Bidari Mohammad Suhaili.

Hantavirus dalam MySejahtera

FOTO: FACEBOOK HANIFAH HAJAR TAIB



Hanifah Hajar (duduk, tengah) ketika Sambutan Hari Jururawat Antarabangsa Peringkat Kebangsaan 2026 di Putrajaya pada Selasa.

KKM akan tambah baik aplikasi itu bagi beri maklumat terkini berkaitan penyakit berjangkit

PUTRAJAYA - Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM) akan menambah baik aplikasi MySejahtera dengan menyediakan penjejak wabak Hantavirus menerusi menu *Disease Tracker* pada papan pemuka aplikasi itu sekiranya diperlukan kelak, kata Timbalan Menteri Kesihatan, Datuk Hanifah Hajar Taib.

Beliau berkata, langkah itu bagi membolehkan pengguna mendapatkan maklumat terkini berkaitan pengesanan penyakit berjangkit berkenaan dengan lebih mudah pada masa nyata.

"Buat masa ini, kami akan lihat

dan pantau sebanyak yang boleh. Jika perlu, insya-ALLAH kami akan pastikan (pengesanan jangkitan Hantavirus) disertakan dalam aplikasi MySejahtera.

"Kami harap perkara ini terkawal kerana mungkin dari segi pengalaman selepas Covid-19, kami harus berwaspada pada tahap lebih tinggi dan kami tak mahu Hantavirus merebak," katanya selepas menghadiri Sambutan Hari Jururawat Antarabangsa Peringkat Kebangsaan 2026 di sini pada Selasa.

Beliau berkata demikian ketika diminta mengulas sama ada KKM akan menambah baik aplikasi MySejahtera dengan menambah Hantavirus ke dalam senarai penyakit yang boleh dipantau melalui menu *Disease Tracker* pada papan pemuka aplikasi MySejahtera, bagi memperkasakan pengguna dengan

akses maklumat titik panas jangkitan di kawasan sekitar mereka secara masa nyata.

Senarai wabak sedia ada pada menu *Disease Tracker* adalah denggi, tuberkulosis (TB), demam campak, penyakit tangan, kaki dan mulut (HFMD), Covid-19, rabies manusia dan rabies haiwan.

Beliau berkata, walaupun terdapat tiga kematian dan beberapa jangkitan, buat masa ini keadaan dilihat masih terkawal dan melibatkan negara-negara Barat serta belum menunjukkan penularan ke Asia.

Media antarabangsa melaporkan negara Eropah meningkatkan langkah pemantauan dan pengasingan selepas berlakunya wabak Hantavirus yang dikaitkan dengan kapal persiaran milik Belanda, MV *Hondius*. - *Bernama*

Perketat standard ambil pelajar kejururawatan, elak jejas kualiti kerja

• Jururawat berijazah dan jururawat pakar memainkan peranan penting dalam membuat keputusan klinikal, menyelaras penjagaan pesakit kompleks serta menyokong inovasi dalam perkhidmatan kesihatan

• Pendekatan jangka pendek seperti menurunkan syarat kemasukan ke program kejururawatan bukanlah langkah yang bijak. Kualiti tidak boleh dikompromi demi kuantiti



Timbalan Dekan Akademik & Pengantarabangsaan, Kulliyah Kejururawatan, Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM)

Oleh Prof Dr Mohd Said Nurumal
bhrencana@bh.com.my

Semalam dalam kita baru menyambut Hari Jururawat Sedunia, kita perlu sedar perbincangan mengenai kekurangan jururawat di negara ini mesti beranjak daripada retorik kepada tindakan dasar yang berani dan berfokus.

Hakikatnya, krisis ini tidak boleh terus dilihat sebagai tanggungjawab tunggal Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM), sebaliknya ia menuntut pembabitin aktif agensi teras seperti Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam (JPA) dan Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi (KPT), terutama dalam memperkukuh rantaian bekalan dan pengekaln bakat kejururawatan negara.

Antara realiti yang sering terlepas pandang ialah permintaan tinggi dalam kalangan pelajar cemerlang terhadap program ijazah kejururawatan. Data permohonan melalui Unit Pusat Universiti (UPU) saban tahun menunjukkan bidang ini kekal sebagai pilihan utama ramai pelajar berprestasi tinggi.

Ini mencerminkan profesion kejururawatan masih mempunyai daya tarikan, nilai sosial dan prospek kerjaya signifikan. Namun, persoalan kritikalnya adakah sistem kita bersedia menyokong, membiayai dan mengekalkan bakat ini?

Di sinilah peranan JPA dan KPT menjadi amat penting. Penyediaan biasiswa, dermasiswa dan skim tajaan komprehensif kepada pelajar ijazah kejururawatan dalam negara perlu diperkasakan secara sistematik.

Kegagalan menyediakan sokongan kewangan mencukupi membuka ruang kepada negara jiran menawarkan tajaan lebih kompetitif. Akibatnya, siswazah terbaik negara berpotensi menyumbang kepakaran mereka di luar negara satu fenomena penghijrahan bakat yang merugikan sistem kesihatan tanah air dalam jangka panjang.

Lebih tiga dekad selepas pengenalan program ijazah kejururawatan di negara ini, adalah tidak wajar jika pelaburan dalam pendidikan ini masih dianggap sebagai beban fiskal. Sebaliknya, bukti global jelas menunjukkan peningkatan tahap pendidikan jururawat berhubung kait dengan peningkatan hasil klinikal pesakit, pengurangan kadar komplikasi serta kecekapan sistem kesihatan.

Jururawat berijazah dan jururawat pakar memainkan peranan penting dalam membuat keputusan klinikal, menyelaras penjagaan pesakit kompleks serta menyokong inovasi dalam perkhidmatan kesihatan.

Pengalaman negara dalam mengurus krisis pandemik COVID-19 sepatutnya menjadi cerminan kepada keutamaan dasar. Kerajaan memperuntukkan sumber besar untuk memastikan akses vaksin dan melindungi kesihatan rakyat.

Rasional di sebalik pelaburan berkenaan adalah jelas, iaitu kesihatan rakyat adalah asas kepada kestabilan negara. Prinsip sama perlu diterjemahkan dalam pembangunan tenaga kerja kesihatan, khususnya kejururawatan.

Tanpa tenaga kerja mencukupi dan berkualiti, sebarang pelaburan dalam infrastruktur atau teknologi kesihatan tidak akan mencapai impak optimum.

Pada masa sama, pendekatan jangka pendek seperti

menurunkan syarat kemasukan ke program kejururawatan bukanlah langkah yang bijak. Kualiti tidak boleh dikompromi demi kuantiti.

Profesion kejururawatan hari ini menuntut keupayaan kognitif tinggi, kemahiran klinikal kompleks serta kecekapan membuat keputusan dalam situasi kritikal. Oleh itu, sebarang usaha melonggarkan standard kemasukan hanya akan memberi implikasi negatif kepada kualiti penjagaan pesakit dalam jangka panjang.

Strategi lebih mampan

Pendekatan ini wajar dihentikan sepenuhnya menjelang 2027 dan digantikan dengan strategi lebih mampan seperti memperkukuh sokongan akademik dan kewangan kepada pelajar berkualiti.

Cadangan mengekalkan lima kredit untuk kesinambungan ke peringkat ijazah yang boleh menjadi pemangkin kepada mobiliti akademik dan peningkatan kelayakan jururawat sedia ada.

Selain aspek pembiayaan pendidikan asas, peluang pembangunan kerjaya melalui Hadiah Latihan Persekutuan (HLP) perlu dipergiat. Lebih ramai jururawat perlu diberi peluang melanjutkan pengajian ke peringkat sarjana dan kepakaran klinikal.

Negara memerlukan lebih ramai jururawat pakar dalam bidang kritikal seperti penjagaan rapi, kecemasan, dialisis, penyakit kronik dan kesihatan komuniti. Ini bukan sahaja meningkatkan kualiti penjagaan, malah memperkukuh keupayaan sistem kesihatan dalam menghadapi cabaran masa depan

termasuk penuaan populasi dan peningkatan penyakit tidak berjangkit.

Tambahan pula, pendekatan bersepadu antara JPA, KPT dan KKM boleh merangka satu pelan nasional pembangunan kejururawatan lebih mampan, termasuk unjuran keperluan tenaga kerja jangka panjang, penajajaran kapasiti institusi pengajian tinggi serta mekanisme penempatan kerja lebih efisien.

Tanpa perancangan strategik ini, negara akan terus berdepan ketidakseimbangan antara penawaran dan permintaan tenaga jururawat.

Dari sudut psikososial dan motivasi kerja, jururawat yang melihat laluan kerjaya jelas daripada pendidikan asas, kepakaran hingga ke peranan kepimpinan akan lebih cenderung untuk kekal berkhidmat dalam negara. Ini secara langsung mengurangkan kadar penghijrahan tenaga mahir dan meningkatkan kestabilan sistem kesihatan.

Kesimpulannya, krisis jururawat di negara ini memerlukan kepemimpinan dasar berani dan kolaboratif. JPA dan KPT bukan sekadar penyokong, tetapi pemacu utama dalam memastikan kelestarian tenaga kerja kejururawatan negara.

Pelaburan dalam pendidikan dan pembangunan jururawat bukanlah kos, tetapi strategi jangka panjang untuk menjamin kesejahteraan rakyat dan daya tahan sistem kesihatan negara.

Sempena Hari Jururawat Sedunia ini, sudah tiba masanya kita beralih daripada penghargaan simbolik kepada reformasi dasar yang konkrit. Masa depan kesihatan Malaysia bergantung kepada keberanian kita membuat keputusan hari ini.



KKM TANGANI ISU BEBAN PETUGAS KESIHATAN

Sasar laksana pendigitalan semua fasiliti sebelum 2029

Kuala Lumpur: Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (KKM) meletak sasaran melaksanakan pendigitalan sepenuhnya di semua fasiliti kesihatan awam sebelum 2029, sekali gus menghapuskan budaya 'berperang' dengan birokrasi dan timbunan kertas kerja yang membebankan.

Menterinya, Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad berkata, faham dan akui, beban kerja yang berat serta tekanan mental yang membelenggu petugas kesihatan adalah realiti yang memerlukan pembedahan menyeluruh.

"Kami mahu doktor kembali kepada tugas hakiki iaitu merawat pesakit. Fokus KKM sekarang bukan lagi sekadar memberikan penjelasan, tetapi mencari jalan penyelesaian yang tuntas dan berkesan.

"Kami sedang memperbaiki sistem ini supaya lebih prihatin, mengangkat digniti dan memulihkan



PENDIGITALAN sepenuhnya mampu hapus budaya 'berperang' dengan birokrasi dan timbunan kertas kerja yang membebankan di semua fasiliti kesihatan awam.

maruah setiap petugas kesihatan di negara ini," katanya dalam kenyataan.

Katanya, menamatkan era 'Doktor Kontrak' adalah langkah pertama yang kritikal, namun ia bukan penyelesaian muktamad.

Sejak 2023, kata beliau, lebih 14,000 pegawai perubatan sudah dilantik ke jawatan tetap dan sebagai kesinambungannya, 4,500 lagi jawatan tetap untuk pegawai perubatan akan ditawarkan tahun ini.

"Ini adalah komitmen fiskal kerajaan demi memastikan doktor muda kita mempunyai masa depan yang stabil," katanya.

Melalui pindaan Akta Perubatan 1971 (Akta 50) juga katanya, KKM memperkuatkan *Parallel Pathway* dan latihan kepakaran tempatan.

"Dengan sasaran 13,000 doktor pakar menjelang 2030, kami mahu tenaga pakar kita dihargai dan kekal berkhidmat di tanah air sendiri," katanya.

KKM pantau perkembangan penularan hantavirus

Putrajaya: Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (KKM) memantau rapat perkembangan penularan virus baharu yang dilaporkan di beberapa negara Barat, namun setakat ini belum terdapat indikasi ia merebak ke rantau Asia.

Timbalan Menteri Kesihatan, Datuk Hanifah Hajar Taib berkata, KKM sentiasa berhubung rapat dengan Pertubuhan Kesihatan Se-

dunia (WHO) dan organisasi kesihatan antarabangsa lain bagi mendapatkan perkembangan terkini mengenai situasi itu.

Menurutnya, walaupun terdapat tiga kematian dan beberapa kes jangkitan dilaporkan, keadaan masih dianggap terkawal dan kebanyakannya berlaku di negara Barat.

"Buat masa ini belum ada petunjuk virus itu akan me-

rebak ke Asia. Alhamdulillah, keadaan masih terkawal, namun kita tetap memantau secara dekat," katanya pada program Hari Jururawat Antarabangsa dan Seminar Kejururawatan di Pusat Konvensyen Antarabangsa Putrajaya (PICC), di sini, semalam.

Terdahulu, media melaporkan KKM mempertingkatkan pengawasan dan kawalan sempadan bagi menge-

kang penularan wabak Hantavirus, meskipun tiada kes tempatan dilaporkan dalam kalangan rakyat Malaysia setakat ini.

Menterinya, Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad berkata KKM mengekalkan tahap kesiapsiagaan tinggi melalui pemantauan global dan pemeriksaan ketat di semua pintu masuk antarabangsa, khususnya ke atas semua kapal dan bot

yang memasuki perairan Malaysia.

Beliau berkata demikian ketika ditanya sama ada KKM akan menambah ciri pengesanan virus menerusi aplikasi MySejahtera, khususnya pada bahagian Disease Tracker.

Katanya, pengaktifan fungsi tambahan itu akan dipertimbangkan sekiranya keadaan memerlukan. "Jika perlu, kita pastikan

sistem pemantauan dipertingkatkan. Pengalaman selepas pandemik Covid-19 mengajar kita supaya lebih berwaspada," katanya.

Menurut beliau, beberapa negara jiran juga sudah mula mengambil langkah kawalan lebih ketat termasuk menjalankan saringan awal terhadap penumpang kapal dan pengembara yang memasuki negara mereka.