

Quack medicine still sells

Consumer demand is high despite a lack of certification

By RAGANATHINI VETHASALAM
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PETALING JAYA: She sells “red pills” which ostensibly help in reducing weight.

“I make herbal concoctions and slimming. I named it the red pill. Sales have been great. People would buy them,” said the traditional medicine practitioner based in Kelantan.

She added that there is high demand for traditional medicines.

“When the price is low, there is a market for it. Buyers want cheap products. I make a good profit from just selling this home-made medicine online,” she said, declining to be named.

She admitted that restrictions on social media platforms are not that tight and sellers are able to market their products without many questions, especially in terms of certification.

But she was tight-lipped when asked whether she had received complaints about any side effects

from her red pills.

Checks by *The Star* on e-commerce sites found that pills, powders and creams made of herbal and natural ingredients are widely available.

Many are sold on the premise that they have no side effects.

Some of these products have no labels either. They are marketed simply as homeopathy medicines that could supposedly cure a host of issues including piles, skin conditions and tonsillitis.

A foreign worker, who only wanted to be known as Leya, said she would buy boxes of abortion pills and morning after pills from her country and sell them to other foreign workers in Malaysia.

“Sometimes their Malaysian friends would buy from me too. It is not easy to buy such pills here due to restrictions and the need for prescription,” she said.

“So, they self-prescribe and they come to me when they are desperate to prevent pregnancy.”

She said the boxes are usually

hidden carefully among clothes in her suitcase or decanted and kept in vitamin bottles to evade airport security.

“It helps me earn an extra income in Malaysia as I am able to get these medicines for a cheap price in my country,” she said.

Federation of Chinese Physicians and Acupuncturists Associations Malaysia president Prof Dr Ng Po Kok acknowledged that there are indeed many counterfeit traditional medicines in the market.

“We advise the public to check whether the products are registered with the Health Ministry. Look for the MAL registration number,” he said.

He said consumers should not buy traditional medicines from roadside stalls, door-to-door sellers or even some online platforms.

“If they wish to take traditional medicines, it is recommended that they first consult a licensed and registered TCM practitioner recognised by the Health Ministry

to ensure safe usage,” he said.

The most common forms of counterfeit traditional medicines found in the market are those claiming to treat rheumatism and relieve pain for the elderly.

“Many of these are locally produced counterfeits,” he said.

He also urged the Health Ministry to strengthen enforcement against illegal importation of traditional medicines and to organise more public awareness programmes to educate the public on how to identify registered products.

Coalition of Traditional Malay Medicine Practitioners Association Malaysia founder and president Assoc Prof Adzhar Latif said unregistered medicines usually come in the form of tablets, capsules, powder or liquid.

As certified practitioners, he said they could dispense such medication directly to the people.

“We compound it. We can do it ourselves and dispense it to the patient,” he said.

RM30mil of unregistered traditional medicines seized last three years

PETALING JAYA: Unregistered traditional medicines worth over RM30mil have been seized over the past three years, the Pharmacy Enforcement Division revealed.

“Throughout the period from 2023 to 2025, the Health Ministry, through the Pharmacy Enforcement Division, had intensified enforcement efforts to curb the sales and distribution of unregistered products across both physical and digital marketplaces,” it said.

The division told *The Star* that it had conducted 4,035 enforcement raids nationwide based on public complaints, intelligence gathering, monitoring and surveillance, inspection of physical premises as well as monitoring of online sales platforms.

“As a result of these enforcement activities, 43,122 unregistered products were seized, which include 19,657 traditional medicines,” the division said.

The division told *The Star* that it had conducted 4,035 enforcement raids nationwide based on public complaints, intelligence gathering, monitoring and surveillance, inspection of physical premises as well as monitoring of online sales platforms.

“As a result of these enforcement activities, 43,122 unregistered products were seized, which include 19,657 traditional medicines,” the division said.

The total value of unregistered products seized between 2023 and 2025 was RM108,650,331, of which traditional products made up RM31,298,018.

Last year, the division received 1,009 complaints. Meanwhile, there were 539 complaints in 2024 and 394 complaints in 2023.

“The sale of unregistered products violates Regulation 7(1)(a) of the Control of Drugs and Cosmetics Regulations 1984 and constitutes an offence under Regulation 30(1) of the same regulations, punishable under Section 12(1) of the Sale of Drugs Act,” it said.

Offenders may be subject to a fine not exceeding RM25,000, imprisonment not exceeding three years or both for the first offence, and a fine not exceeding RM50,000, imprisonment not exceeding five years or both for subsequent offences.

“In addition to enforcement operations, the Pharmacy Enforcement Division proactively and continuously monitors and screens advertisements across all media platforms, including print media, electronic media and new media (digital) platforms,” it said.

The division has been screening websites and various social media platforms.

In the past three years, a total of 89,997 medical advertisements were screened.

As a result, 52,618 URL links were blocked or removed from e-commerce platforms during the same period.

Warning letters were also issued, investigations carried out and offenders prosecuted.

“The division also collaborates with government and private entities to strengthen efforts in combating the distribution of unregistered medicines in Malaysia,” it said.

Bazaar hygiene reminder

Don't use same gloves for food and cash, vendors told

GEORGE TOWN: Food handlers who wear gloves but use the same gloved hands to handle cash are committing a health offence, says Penang Health Committee chairman Daniel Gooi Zi Sen.

He said the practice posed a high risk of cross-contamination and defeated the purpose of wearing gloves in the first place.

"Wearing gloves is encouraged. But if the same gloved hands prepare food and handle money, that constitutes an offence," Gooi said.

Banknotes, he said, pass through a multi-

tude of hands so food sellers must be mindful about hygiene.

Gooi said 235 compound notices amounting to RM26,950 were issued after 18 inspection operations statewide up to March 1.

A total of 1,256 stalls were checked and 2,452 food handlers were screened and given health education.

"Most offences involved hygiene issues during food handling, such as not wearing aprons and poor cleanliness of utensils.

"We have warned food sellers against touching money with gloved hands and

they need to be mindful of this," he said.

Traders should opt for e-wallet or cashless transactions whenever possible, he said after inspecting the Ramadan bazaar at Prangin Mall on Tuesday.

Sixty food samples were taken for laboratory analysis, and follow-up action would be taken if any breached food safety standards.

No seizures have been made so far.

"Our aim is prevention. We don't want to cause inconvenience to food sellers, but care is needed to ensure food safety for consumers," Gooi said.

Johor's main hospital stretched thin

HSA requires 2,000 more staff to meet current needs

By YEE XIANG YUN
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JOHOR BARU: Johor is pressing the SOS button for more doctors and nurses to address severe manpower shortage at Hospital Sultanah Aminah (HSA).

State health and environment committee chairman Ling Tian Soon said HSA is currently operating with about 4,800 healthcare workers and 1,203 beds, a caseload comparable to that of Hospital Kuala Lumpur (HKL).

"But HKL has about 10,000 staff, more than double that of HSA. Our work is no less than HKL in terms of cases, but in terms of doctors and staff we have much fewer.

"HSA's manpower positions still follow the old model. The ratio just does not tally," he said in an interview.

Ling pointed out that HSA's specialist polyclinics attended to more than 2,000 patients daily, while its emergency and trauma department handled over 300 cases.

On average annually, the hospital records more than 85,700 admissions.

The exco member said the une-

ven distribution of manpower left HSA overstretched as it also served as a referral centre for the southern region, receiving cases from Melaka, Negri Sembilan and Pahang.

"It is a fairly uneven distribution," he said, adding that HKL's emergency unit has about 110 medical officers, while HSA has only 40 to 50.

The Johor government recently submitted an appeal to the Health Ministry for more than 2,000 additional healthcare workers for

HSA, he revealed.

"The ministry should send more people here to tackle the lack of staff," he said, adding that Singapore is a strong pull factor for healthcare workers in the state due to the stronger dollar.

Ling said the Johor government started an incentive payment of RM100 for healthcare workers and increased it to RM500 this year to motivate them.

"The state is also exploring housing rental subsidies and other initiatives," he added.

A recent report by a portal claimed that HSA was operating beyond safe and sustainable limits, placing medical officers, and



Manpower crunch: Hospital Sultanah Aminah is currently operating with about 4,800 healthcare workers despite handling a caseload comparable to Hospital Kuala Lumpur, which has around 10,000 staff. — YEE XIANG YUN/The Star

ultimately patients, at risk.

On a brighter note, Ling said a RM142mil upgrading project at HSA is progressing, with major ward renovations to complete soon.

"Work on operating theatres are being planned carefully to avoid disrupting critical surgeries," he added.

He said the most challenging component involved the middle two floors of the block, where 12 operating theatres are located.

"These operating rooms cannot be interrupted. The wiring systems are very old...the whole system could trip.

"To avoid disruption, the state

is applying to build three temporary operating theatres that can be used while several existing operating theatres are closed during renovation," he added.

Ling said the project, which commenced in 2023, is expected to be fully completed next year.

"At present, upgrades to HSA's fifth floor general wards have been completed, while Level Four is also done and due for handover soon.

"The ground floor upgrades have been completed, with the pharmacy and revenue unit to be temporarily relocated there to facilitate operations," he added.

Ling said the neonatal intensive

care unit adjacent to the upgraded wards has been reopened in stages.

A total of 124 beds were affected under the upgrading plan.

The upgrading of the emergency and trauma department is also almost completed, he said, adding that the state government has allocated RM163,000 to improve facilities for green zone cases.

This is to replace the previous fever clinic waiting area where patients had to sit under the sun.

Ling said the upgrading of normal wards is expected to be completed this year, while the first-class and royal wards are still undergoing final touch-ups.

GOF nabs 21, seizes RM21m in tainted frozen food

KOTA KINABALU: The General Operations Force (GOF) Sabah Brigade has detained 21 people and seized allegedly tainted frozen food estimated to be worth RM20.88 million during Op Bersepadu Chiller, which was conducted simultaneously in seven districts in the state on Wednesday.

The operation, which ran from 8am to 6pm, was carried out in Kota Kinabalu, Tawau, Sandakan, Beluran, Keningau, Lahad Datu and Kunak, involving 204 personnel from various agencies.

Sabah GOF Brigade commander, Senior Assistant Commissioner Nor Omar Sappi, said the integrated operation was conducted following intelligence on the smuggling of chicken, meat and other frozen foods.

He said the operation also involved the Sabah Department of Veterinary Services, the Health Ministry and local authorities to ensure compliance with laws related to food safety and hygiene.

"A total of 21 people aged between 22 and 40 were detained,

comprising 17 local men, one local woman, one foreign man and one foreign woman," he said yesterday.

All those detained had no prior criminal records.

He said the seized items included various frozen food products such as chicken, beef and pork, with the total value estimated at RM20,883,909.85.

Omar said among the offences detected are under Section 15(1) of the Animal Enactment 2015, Section 13 of the Food Act 1983, Food Regulations 1985, Trade Licensing Ordinance 1948, By-Laws 1981, and Regulation 38(1)(c) of the Food Hygiene Regulations 2009.

He said all arrests and seized items had been handed over to the relevant agencies for further action and investigation.

"Police will continue to intensify enforcement operations."

The public with information related to smuggling activities or the sale of suspicious frozen food are urged to channel it to the police.



Enforcement personnel inspecting a cold room containing allegedly tainted frozen chicken, beef and other foods. PIC COURTESY OF GOF

Rampas RM20.88j makanan sejuk beku

Kota Kinabalu: Pasukan Gerakan Am (PGA) Briged Sabah menahan 21 individu dengan rampasan makanan sejuk beku dianggarkan bernilai RM20.88 juta dalam Op Bersepadu Chiller yang dijalankan serentak di tujuh daerah di negeri ini, Rabu lalu.

Operasi bermula jam 8 pagi hingga 6 petang itu dijalankan di Kota Kinabalu, Tawau, Sandakan, Beluran, Keningau, Lahad Datu dan Kunak membabitkan seramai 204 pegawai dan anggota pelbagai agensi.

Komander PGA Briged Sabah Senior Asisten Komisioner Nor Omar Sappi berkata, operasi bersepadu berkenaan dijalankan hasil maklumat risikan berhubung kegiatan penyeludupan ayam, daging serta makanan sejuk beku.

Menurutnya, operasi itu turut disertai Jabatan Perkhidmatan Veterinar Sabah (JPVS), Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (KKM) dan pihak berkuasa tempatan bagi memastikan pematuan undang-undang berkaitan keselamatan serta



MAKANAN ayam, daging sejuk beku yang dirampas dalam Op Bersepadu Chiller di Sabah.

kebersihan makanan.

"Seramai 21 individu berusia antara 22 hingga 40 tahun ditahan dan daripada jumlah itu, seramai 17 lelaki dan seorang wanita warga tempatan serta seorang lelaki dan seorang wanita warga asing," katanya dalam kenyataan semalam.

Beliau berkata, semua individu yang ditahan didapati tidak mempunyai rekod kesalahan lampau.

Menurutnya, rampasan

meliputi pelbagai barangan makanan sejuk beku termasuk ayam, daging beku dan daging babi dengan nilai keseluruhan dianggarkan RM20,883,909.85.

Nor Omar berkata, antara kesalahan yang dikesan termasuk Seksyen 15(1) Enakmen Haiwan 2015, Seksyen 13 Akta Makanan 1983, Peraturan-Peraturan Makanan 1985, Ordinan Perlesenan Perdagangan 1948, Undang-Undang Kecil 1981 serta Peraturan

38(1)(c) Peraturan-Peraturan Kebersihan Makanan 2009.

Menurutnya, semua tangkapan dan rampasan sudah diserahkan kepada agensi berkaitan untuk tindakan serta siasatan lanjut.

"PDRM akan terus mempergiat operasi penguatkuasaan bagi memastikan setiap premis mematuhi peraturan ditetapkan.

"Langkah ini juga bagi membanteras penjualan

ayam, daging dan makanan sejuk beku yang diragui status halal serta kebersihannya terutama ketika umat Islam melaksanakan ibadah puasa dan menyambut Aidilfitri," katanya.

Beliau turut meminta orang ramai yang mempunyai maklumat berkaitan aktiviti penyeludupan atau penjualan makanan sejuk beku meragukan supaya menyalurkannya kepada pihak polis.

Pinda akta bantu individu hidap penyakit jarang jumpa

Mohd Firdaus Maskan, Putrajaya

Bayangkan seorang kanak-kanak yang mindanya tajam dan bercita-cita tinggi, namun tubuhnya dikhianati genetik sendiri. Setiap langkah ke sekolah adalah satu perjuangan fizikal menyakitkan dan setiap huruf ditulis satu kemenangan besar mengatasi keletihan melampau.

Inilah realiti pertarungan senyap dihadapi penghidap penyakit jarang jumpa (PJJ) di Malaysia. Menurut data global, kira-kira satu dalam 4,000 individu menghidap PJJ, dengan anggaran 10,000 pesakit di negara kita.

Prof Datin Dr Norlinah Mohamed Ibrahim dari Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) mendedahkan 80 peratus penyakit ini bersifat genetik seperti taksia Spinocerebellar (SCA) yang meragut keseimbangan badan secara progresif. Namun, persoalannya di manakah ruang mereka dalam sistem pendidikan kita yang kompetitif?

Bagi pesakit PJJ, sekolah bukan sekadar tempat menimba ilmu, tetapi medan ranjau fizikal dan mental. Ramai tercicir bukan kerana kurang cerdas, tetapi kerana sistem tidak anjal.

Adakah adil seorang murid menghidap penyakit saraf kronik dipaksa bersaing dalam dewan peperiksaan dan dengan tempoh masa sama, seperti rakan sebaya sihat.

Hakikatnya, akses pendidikan sering terhalang oleh stigma dan kurangnya kesedaran keadaan pesakit tidak nampak pada pandangan fizikal.

Banyak kes PJJ membabitkan kegagalan fungsi organ dalaman seperti sistem pernafasan tidak

dapat dilihat dengan mata kasar. Apabila seorang anak kerap bercuti untuk rawatan atau tertidur di kelas akibat kesan ubat, adakah kita memahami atau sekadar melabel mereka sebagai malas?

Bolehkah mereka menduduki peperiksaan besar? Jawabnya, boleh, asalkan terdapat penyesuaian khas diberikan. Ini termasuk penyediaan masa tambahan, bilik peperiksaan di tingkat bawah bagi yang sukar bergerak atau bantuan pembantu penulis bagi mereka yang mengalami gangguan motor kasar.

Penyesuaian ini bukan satu keistimewaan, tetapi satu keperluan untuk mewujudkan padang permainan rata. Tanpa sokongan ini, potensi intelek pesakit PJJ akan terkubur di bawah kelemahan fizikal mereka. Persoalannya, adakah masyarakat kita bersedia menerima kecemerlangan itu mem-

punyai definisi berbeza bagi setiap individu?

Kaedah pembelajaran terbaik bagi golongan ini adalah model pendidikan fleksibel. Penggunaan teknologi bantuan seperti perisian beralih suara kepada teks sangat membantu murid yang otot tangannya semakin lemah. Selain itu, sokongan emosi dan kaunseling genetik adalah komponen kritikal perlu ada dalam ekosistem pembelajaran mereka.

Kita memerlukan lebih daripada sekadar buku teks sebaliknya empati berstruktur dan sokongan sistemik lebih kuat. Pendidikan adalah hak sejagat dan jangan biarkan penyakit mereka menjadi punca ilmu mereka juga menjadi jarang-jarang diperolehi.

Cadangan untuk memperkasakan undang-undang perlindungan golongan kurang upaya (OKU) adalah langkah kritikal. Pindaan terhadap undang-undang sedia ada perlu dibuat supaya definisi 'kurang upaya' tidak hanya terhad kepada kecacatan fizikal yang nyata, tetapi merangkumi isu perubatan kronik dan kegagalan fungsi organ.

Tanpa perlindungan undang-undang yang teguh, pesakit PJJ akan terus dinafikan hak asasi mereka dalam mendapatkan bantuan kebajikan dan kesaksamaan peluang.

Renungan kita bersama, jika anak ini adalah anak anda, adakah anda sanggup melihat masa depannya terpadam hanya kerana keadaannya menghidap PJJ. Kita perlu bertindak sekarang supaya tiada lagi jiwa terpinggir.

“Bagi pesakit PJJ, sekolah bukan sekadar tempat menimba ilmu, tetapi medan ranjau fizikal dan mental. Ramai tercicir bukan kerana kurang cerdas, tetapi kerana sistem tidak anjal”

Kenali gejala paru-paru berparut

Petanda boleh sebabkan pesakit mudah penat, sesak nafas walaupun buat aktiviti ringan

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Sesak nafas ketika berjalan, batuk kering berpanjangan dan cepat penat sering dianggap perkara biasa, khususnya dalam kalangan warga emas.

Namun, gejala yang kelihatan remeh itu sebenarnya boleh menjadi petanda awal kepada penyakit serius dikenali sebagai penyakit paru-paru berparut atau *Interstitial Lung Disease* (ILD).

ILD ialah kumpulan penyakit jarang ditemui yang membabitkan keradangan dan pembentukan parut pada tisu paru-paru.

Keadaan ini menyebabkan paru-paru menjadi keras dan kurang elastik, sekali gus menjejaskan keupayaannya menyerap oksigen.

Pakar Perubatan Respiratori, Institut Perubatan Respiratori (IPR) Malaysia, Dr Syazatul Syakirin Sirol Aflah, berkata ILD bukan satu penyakit tunggal, sebaliknya istilah payung atau kelompok yang merangkumi lebih 200 jenis penyakit paru-paru dengan punca berbeza.

"Secara umum, ILD adalah penyakit jarang jumpa. Di Malaysia, antara yang paling kerap ditemui ialah *Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis* (IPF), yang lazimnya berlaku dalam kalangan individu berusia 60 tahun ke atas, khususnya bekas perokok atau perokok tegar dan puncanya masih tidak diketahui," katanya kepada BH.

Beliau berkata, selain IPF, ILD juga boleh dikaitkan dengan penyakit autoimun seperti *rheumatoid arthritis* dan *scleroderma*.

Katanya, penyakit ini turut boleh

berpunca daripada tindak balas alahan terhadap zarah halus di udara seperti kulat, bakteria atau protein haiwan, iaitu satu keadaan yang dikenali sebagai *hypersensitivity pneumonitis*.

"Contohnya pendedahan berpanjangan kepada bulu burung. Aktiviti memberi makan burung di kawasan awam atau sekitar rumah ibadat boleh menyebabkan protein halus itu disedut ke dalam paru-paru tanpa disedari dan mencetuskan keradangan," katanya.

Penting diagnosis awal

Beliau berkata, hanya sebilangan kecil individu yang terdedah akan menghidap penyakit ini kerana ia turut dipengaruhi oleh faktor genetik dan sistem imun.

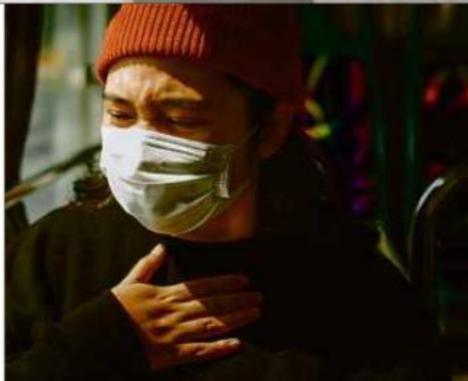
Namun, katanya jika dikesan awal dan punca pendedahan dikenal pasti serta dielakkan, penyakit itu berpotensi untuk pulih.

Mengulas faktor pekerjaan, Dr Syazatul Syakirin berkata, pekerja sektor pembinaan, kuari dan industri berat berisiko tinggi akibat pendedahan kepada habuk silika.

Katanya, zarah halus ini boleh masuk jauh ke dalam paru-paru dan mencetuskan keradangan yang akhirnya membentuk parut kekal.

"Pemakaian peralatan perlindungan diri (PPE) dan saringan kesihatan berkala sangat penting. Malangnya, ada pesakit hanya dikesan apabila keadaan sudah teruk," katanya.

Beliau menjelaskan, pembentukan parut menyebabkan paru-paru menjadi keras dan sukar mengembang, sekali gus mengurangkan



keupayaan menyerap oksigen.

Akibatnya, pesakit mudah penat dan mengalami sesak nafas walaupun ketika melakukan aktiviti harian yang ringan.

Katanya, antara gejala awal ILD termasuk sesak nafas ketika berjalan atau menaiki tangga, batuk kering berpanjangan, cepat letih serta penuru-

Antara gejala masalah ILD ialah mudah penat dan mengalami sesak nafas. (Foto hiasan)

memperlahankan perkembangan penyakit dan meningkatkan kualiti hidup pesakit," katanya.

Peranan jenis rawatan

Mengenai rawatan katanya, ILD bergantung kepada punca penyakit, yang mana bagi kes membabitkan keradangan, ubat anti-radang seperti steroid boleh membantu memperlahankan proses pembentukan parut.

"Ubat antifibrotik pula diguna untuk melambatkan kemerosotan fungsi paru-paru, khususnya bagi pesakit IPF," katanya.

Selain ubatan, rawatan sokongan memainkan peranan besar, termasuk terapi oksigen di rumah, vaksinasi serta rehabilitasi paru-paru yang merangkumi latihan pernafasan, senaman dan pengurusan tenaga harian.

Katanya, dalam kes terpilih iaitu pada tahap penyakit teruk, pemindahan paru-paru turut menjadi pilihan, namun ia berdepan kekangan dari segi ketersediaan penderma yang sesuai.

Dr Syazatul Syakirin berkata,

perubahan gaya hidup juga penting dalam pengurusan penyakit ini, antaranya berhenti merokok, mengelakkan pendedahan kepada punca penyakit, mengamalkan pemakanan seimbang serta mendapatkan sokongan psikososial.

"Ramai pesakit berdepan tekanan emosi apabila keupayaan fizikal semakin terhad, terutama mereka yang sebelum ini aktif dan berdikari.

"Sokongan keluarga dan rawatan menyeluruh amat penting untuk mengekalkan kualiti hidup mereka," katanya.

Beliau turut menasihatkan orang ramai, tidak memandang ringan gejala pernafasan yang berpanjangan.

"Batuk kering dan sesak nafas bukan sekadar tanda penuaan. Jika gejala ini berlarutan tanpa sebab yang jelas, dapatkan pemeriksaan awal.

"Kesedaran dan tindakan awal boleh membantu melambatkan penyakit ini daripada menjadi lebih parah," katanya.



Dalam kes terpilih iaitu pada tahap penyakit teruk, pemindahan paru-paru turut menjadi pilihan, namun ia berdepan kekangan dari segi ketersediaan penderma yang sesuai"

Dr Syazatul Syakirin Sirol Aflah

