

Sabah cadang perkenal subsidi bayaran PTPTN, yayasan negeri

Inisiatif dijangka bantu ringankan beban hutang lebih 100,000 pelajar

Penampang: Kerajaan Sabah bertadang memperkukuhkan dasar pemberian subsidi bagi pembayaran pinjaman Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional (PTPTN) dan Yayasan Sabah untuk membantu meringankan beban hutang pinjaman per-

seorang anak negeri itu. Ketua Menteri, Datuk Seri Idris Jusi Noh berkata dasar ini dijangka memberi manfaat kepada lebih 100,000 pelajar dan akan dibawa ke Kabinet Sabah dalam masa terdekat untuk diperlembai serta diperincikan terutamanya

daripada segi kewangan.

"Saya optimis dasar ini praktikal untuk dilaksanakan kerana kerajaan negeri sentiasa dengan kedudukan kewangan pada masa akan datang. Ini bukan kewajipan kerajaan negeri memusnahkan lebih banyak anak Sabah dibantu di samping memastikan akses pendidikan sampai kepada pelajar."

Kerajaan negeri memberi penekanan serius kepada soal pendidikan dan pembangunan modal insan kerana kita yakin ge-

lusan anak dengan kepada masa hadapan Sabah," katanya kepada pemberita selepas merasmikan Konvensyen Mahasiswa Sabah, di sini semalam.

Yang hadir sama, Menteri Pendidikan Dalam Negeri dan Kos Sara Hidup, Datuk Arminan Mohd Ali.

Peruncutan lebih tinggi

Haji berkata, sejak 2011, lebih RM1.8 bilion dibelanjakan dalam bidang pendidikan dengan jumlah itu adalah peruncutan ter-

besar dalam sejarah Sabah, sekali gas memperkukuhkan komitmen tinggi kerajaan negeri terhadap generasi muda.

"Berdasar negeri juga menyediakan dana biasiswa tertinggi sejak Merdeka iaitu RM130 juta tahun ini yang memberi manfaat ribuan pelajar daripada pelbagai peringkat pengajian. Lebih 14 inisiatif telah diperkenalkan antaranya subsidi, penerangan dan bantuan SENTOSA untuk anak kita sambung belajar," katanya.

BERNAMA



Alvin Azzah (tiga dari kiri) merasmikan Tapak Garis Panduan RV semasa Pesta Pantai Ragas Labang 2025, semalam. (Foto: Suruhanjaya Penerangan)

Garis panduan tapak RV perlu jadi rujukan demi keselamatan

Selangor: Garis panduan tapak kemudahan rekreasi (RV) perlu dijadikan rujukan semua pihak berkepentingan bagi memastikan pembangunan tapak berkenaan selamat dan teratur, sahaja menjaga kepentingan orang awam.

Timbalan Menteri Perumahan dan Kerajaan Tempatan, Datuk Aiman Athirah Sabu, berkata pentadbir dan pengguna RV disaran mengutamakan pengurusan beretika serta keselamatan alam sekitar supaya tidak timbul sebarang gangguan kepada masyarakat setempat.

Beliau berkata, aktiviti RV bukan sahaja mendorong peng-

katan penggunaan kemudahan ini, malah berpotensi merancakkan ekonomi peribadi setempat melalui penciptaan peluang pekerjaan baharu.

"Garis panduan ini bukan sahaja akan mengawal industri RV tetapi juga meningkatkan daya tarikan Malaysia sebagai destinasi pelancongan beretika-sikan alam dan pengembaraan," katanya pada majlis persembahan Tapak Garis Panduan RV semasa Pesta Pantai Ragas Labang 2025, di sini semalam.

Yang hadir sama, Yang Dipertua Majlis Perbandaran Sepang OMP Sepang, Dr Anis Ahmad, Aiman Athirah yang juga Ahli

Parlimen Sepang berkata, industri RV kini semakin berkembang dan semakin banyak sebagai modal perniagaan serta rekreasi moden.

Beliau berkata, garis panduan RV disediakan PLANMalaysia pada Ogos tahun lalu bagi mencapai jujugan perstarian dan bekerjasama infrastruktur sekali gas mengukuhkan pertumbuhan sektor RV negara.

Katanya, PLANMalaysia berperanan membina perubahan pembangunan beretika mengukuhkan kerangka pengalangan sektor berkenaan yang sedang giat berkembang.

Penyakit jantung kekal ancaman utama di Malaysia

Labuan: Penyakit jantung kekal sebagai ancaman serius di negara ini kerana penyakit ini masih menjadi punca utama kematian yang boleh dicegah.

Timbalan Ketua Pengarah Kesihatan (Kesihatan Awam), Dr Ismail Rahari, berkata statistik Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia pada 2024 menunjukkan penyakit jantung iskemik adalah penyebab kedua tertinggi dalam kematian yang disahkan secara perubatan, iaitu sebanyak 15.1 peratus dan menjadi punca utama kematian individu berusia 45 hingga 69 tahun, melebihi lelaki lebih terjejas berbanding wanita.

"Trend ini membimbangkan kerana bukan hanya menjejaskan kesihatan tetapi juga memberi impak kepada ekonomi negara," katanya pada program Hari Jantung Sedunia, di sini semalam.

Dr Ismail berkata, diabetes, hipertensi, kolesterol tinggi dan tabakan berpanjangan menjadi penyumbang utama kepada penyakit jantung, selain faktor merokok, obesiti, gaya hidup tidak aktif serta tabiat pemakanan tidak sihat.

Beliau berkata, Timbalan Ketua Pengarah Kesihatan dan Morbiditi 2025 melaporkan bahawa 15.6 peratus dewasa menghidap diabetes, hipertensi 29.2 peratus, kolesterol tinggi 35.3 peratus, obesiti 21.9 peratus dan merokok 19 peratus.

"Sebagai Ogos lalu, Labuan mencatatkan 56 kes kardiovaskular baharu dan 1,386 pesakit sedang menerima rawatan penyakit jantung. Angka ini adalah amaran untuk kita mengambil langkah pencegahan sebelum terlambat," katanya.

Beliau turut menggaru orang ramai supaya mengamalkan gaya hidup sihat, menjalani pemeriksaan kesihatan secara berkala dan mengamalkan aktiviti kesedaran.

Dr Ismail berkata, sebanyak 3,677 penduduk di Labuan melakukan pemeriksaan kesihatan setiap bulan lalu.

"Hari Jantung Sedunia tahun ini bertemakan Don't Miss a Beat, menggaru rakyat Malaysia untuk mengamalkan gaya hidup sihat dan tabiat pemakanan lebih sihat demi melindungi jantung mereka," katanya.

BERNAMA

Trend ini membimbangkan kerana bukan hanya menjejaskan kesihatan tetapi juga memberikan impak kepada ekonomi negara

Dr Ismail Rahari, Timbalan Ketua Pengarah Kesihatan (Kesihatan Awam)



Rising costs of food creating risks of malnutrition

➤ Dietitian warns of 'hidden hunger' as families cut back on meat and fish

By KIRTINEE RAMESH
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PETALING JAYA: Soaring food costs are reshaping what urban Malaysians put on their plates, raising concerns for nutrition.

The rise of food prices is altering household diets and putting middle-income families at risk of "hidden hunger", said Malaysian Dietitians' Association council member and freelance dietitian Rozanna M. Rozy.

"In my clinical practice, I see more families, including lower-middle and even middle-income urban households, cutting back on meat, fish, eggs and milk because of higher prices."

"This matches national data showing falling diversity and growing urban food insecurity."

A March 2025 University of Malaya study found nearly one in five urban households face food insecurity, with many switching to cheaper, calorie-dense processed foods.

Globally, healthy staples like lean meat, eggs and fresh produce have risen in price faster than sugary or ultra-processed items, widening the affordability gap.

Rozanna warned that this shift fuels hidden hunger – a form of malnutrition where calorie intake is sufficient but essential nutrients such as iron, zinc, calcium and vitamin A are lacking. Reports, including Khazanah Research Institute's *Unhealthy but Not by Choice*, highlight persistent micronutrient shortfalls despite adequate energy intake.

"Families are adapting in ways that erode diet quality."

"Parents are stretching meals with more rice or instant noodles, buying cheaper processed meats like chicken franks or canned sardines and reducing fresh vegetables," Rozanna said, adding that some buy near-expiry foods or night markets, wait for discounts or dilute soups to feed more mouths, while mothers often skip meals so children can eat.

Children and pregnant women are most at risk, she warned.

"Their nutrient needs are higher relative to body weight, so a lack of iron or vitamin-rich foods can have lasting effects on growth, learning and immunity," she said, highlighting that iron deficiency anaemia, stunted growth and vitamin A shortfalls remain common, weakening immunity and stunting development.

She said the damage can be permanent. Poor diets in the first 1,000 days – from conception to age two – can impair brain growth, learning capacity and lifelong earning potential.

Adults on low-protein diets face muscle loss, frailty and higher risks of cardiovascular and non-

AFFORDABLE PROTEIN-RICH FOODS

 EGGS Key nutrients: High-quality protein, B12, choline	Tip: Buy in trays or in bulk. Store in fridge, stays fresh up to 3–4 weeks.
 LEGUMES Key nutrients: Protein, iron, fibre	Tip: Combine with rice or bread. Store in airtight container to keep fresh.
 CANNED FISH Key nutrients: Protein, Omega-3, calcium	Tip: Choose tomato-based or low-salt options. Shelf life of 2–5 years possible if unopened and stored in cool, dry pantry.
 SOY Key nutrients: Protein, iron, calcium	Tip: Stir-fry, grill or add to curries. Able to stay fresh up to 7 days if kept in proper conditions.
 POULTRY/OFFAL Key nutrients: Protein, iron, Vitamin A	Tip: Use in porridge, stews or stir-fry. Refrigerate for 1–2 days or freeze for longer storage.

THEMUS GRAPHICS BY HANITH KAMAL

communicable diseases. National surveys already show a double burden of obesity and nutrient deficiency within the same households, she said.

Rozanna urged policymakers to address diet quality, not just calorie sufficiency.

"School feeding programmes must include proteins and fresh produce. We need stronger

See also page 10

growth monitoring, targeted support for pregnant women and measures to keep nutrient-rich foods affordable."

Without intervention, she warned, Malaysia could face a silent but serious public health challenge.

"The impact on health and productivity will be felt for generations," she added.

'Eating enough only to feel full, not to stay healthy'

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia's middle class is eating enough to feel full, but not enough to stay healthy.

Urban families are cutting back on protein and key nutrients, creating a wave of hidden hunger that threatens the nation's future, warns University of Malaya researcher Assoc Prof Dr Bakir Mait.

"Studies by Uniof and the Khazanah Research Institute show even children in urban middle-class areas face stunting," he said.

"My own fieldwork confirms this – middle-class families in cities are increasingly affected."

"Rising living costs are pushing households towards cheaper, energy-dense foods. One in five children in Kuala Lumpur's low to middle-income flats were found stunted in earlier Uniof studies – a classic sign of hidden

hunger," Bakir noted.

The problem, he said, is often overlooked.

"While poverty attracts attention and aid, but middle-class families, trapped by high housing, transport and education costs, don't qualify for assistance and due to stigma, stay silent about their struggles."

Evidence of dietary cutbacks is mounting. Families are reducing meat and fish, buying cheaper food, stretching meals with rice and noodles or skipping meals entirely.

"Some quietly rely on free food aid. I've also come across families who simply go without meals because of financial pressure."

He said the consequences are far-reaching. For children, it means stunted growth, weaker learning ability and poorer health.

For adults, he said it brings lower energy, reduced productivity and higher risks of obesity, diabetes and heart disease.

He said nationally, that translates into rising healthcare costs and weaker competitiveness.

Bakir highlighted the double burden of malnutrition: families eating too much cheap, processed food while still missing essential nutrients.

He urged a stronger safety net. "First, we need a system to identify at-risk families, because many will not come forward."

"Programmes like e-Kasih could be expanded to cover struggling middle-class households."

"Nutrition-based support – food vouchers, healthy school meals, subsidies for essentials – must be considered," he said, adding that

community solutions such as urban farming, food banks and NGO partnerships can also improve access to healthy food.

Bakir noted Malaysia already has a foundation, with initiatives like the Rancangan Makanan Tambahan for schoolchildren and Menu Rahmah for affordable meals.

"These programmes work, but they should be widened to include struggling middle-class families."

Other countries, he added, show what's possible such as Brazil invests heavily in school feeding and the Philippines' *Palatanda* scheme, the Philippines targets rice affordability and Indonesia leans on community food support.

"Nations with strong safety nets are better able to cushion families against food insecurity."

School feeding schemes vital lifeline for children

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia's school feeding and food aid schemes remain a lifeline for vulnerable children, but they cannot offset malnutrition or "hidden hunger" without stronger design, closer monitoring and sustained support, said dietitian Rozanna M. Rozy.

Government initiatives such as the Rancangan Makanan Tambahan, School Milk Programme and food basket schemes aim to improve diets, support growth and keep children in school.

They typically provide daily meals, milk or dry staples and in some cases include nutrition lessons or health care referrals.

"Such initiatives are valuable. They reduce underweight issues, improve attendance and encourage better eating habits."

"For many children, they are the only reliable source of nutrient-dense food during the day."

She said past evaluations of feeding schemes showed reductions in underweight issues and wastage, with modest improvements in stunting among primary pupils.

She added that newer models pairing nutrition education with healthier menus have improved eating habits and classroom performance.

Meanwhile, in Sabah and among Orang Asli communities, food baskets combined with parental nutrition lessons have led to gains in weight and height indicators.

"These results show consistent access to nutritious food helps children grow and think better," Rozanna noted.

"But they also reveal the limits of short-term aid."

Weight responds more quickly than height, she explained, as stunting and micronutrient deficiencies need long-term, diverse diets. Milk boosts calcium and protein but does little for iron, zinc or vitamin A unless fortified. Food baskets, meanwhile, often rely heavily on rice, flour and oil, offering calories but little variety.

She said implementation issues further blunt impact. Some schools face irregular deliveries, small portions or poor-quality meals. In remote areas, logistics and cultural food preferences pose hurdles. Without monitoring, food may be wasted or skipped.

"Nutrition education is important, but household diets, poverty, sanitation and infectious diseases also shape growth. Food aid alone cannot fix these."

Rozanna said coverage gaps remain. Most schemes target primary pupils, leaving adolescents unsupported despite ongoing needs. Orang Asli and other vulnerable groups often face patchy access.

She stressed the answer is not to scale back but to strengthen support.

She urged inclusion of more protein-rich and fortified foods, expansion to secondary schools and regular growth monitoring. Training canteen staff, setting quality standards and securing stable funding would also improve reliability.

"Combining food provision with nutrition education for children and parents helps reduce waste and boosts acceptance. We need stronger oversight to ensure meals meet nutritional standards and that children actually consume them."

Rozanna said without deeper reforms the nation risks raising a generation of children who may have enough to eat, but not enough to thrive.

– By KIRTINEE RAMESH

COMMENT

by Assoc Prof Dr Chee Seok Chiong, Assoc Prof Dr Neoh Siew Hong and Dr Lim Yin Sear

Healthy growth in the digital age

EVERY parent dreams of seeing their child grow up healthy, strong and thriving. The first 1,000 days of life, from conception to a child's second birthday, lay the foundation for growth and development. However, supporting children's health must go beyond this critical window.

Today's generation faces new challenges, such as long school hours, less outdoor play, diets high in processed foods, late bedtimes and excessive screen time.

These habits disrupt nutrition, sleep and hormone regulation, further compromising healthy growth.

As Malaysia marked Children's Growth Awareness Day on Sept 20, it is timely to reflect on how nutrition, healthcare and modern lifestyles together shape not only a child's height and weight but also their learning, resilience and long-term health.

Lifelong impact

During the first 1,000 days, a baby's brain forms millions of neural connections every second, reaching about 80% of its adult size by age three.

Physical growth also depends on the quality of nutrition, healthcare and daily care practices.

Missed opportunities in this critical phase can result in stunted growth, poorer learning outcomes and higher risks of chronic illnesses later in life.

Double burden of malnutrition

Despite economic progress, Malaysia faces double burden of malnutrition.

According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS), stunting among children under five rose from 16.6% in 2011 to 21.2% in 2022, while underweight prevalence increased from 11.6% to 15.3%.

Within the Orang Asli communities, the situation remains deeply concerning. The Orang Asli Health Survey 2022 by the Health Ministry shows the prevalence of underweight

issues among Orang Asli children aged five to 10 years, at 31.9%, while the prevalence of stunting among Orang Asli children aged five to 17 years was 29.0%.

At the same time, obesity is on the rise. NHMS 2024 findings show that about 14.4% of children and adolescents aged five to 19 are overweight and a further 13.6% are obese – meaning nearly one in three in this age group faces weight-related health concerns.

Reduced physical activity, increased screen time and greater access to processed foods are fuelling undernutrition and overnutrition – two extremes that threaten Malaysia's health, education and productivity.

Laying healthy foundations

Healthy growth rests on nutrition, active lifestyles and regular health checks. Many Malaysian children lack nutrients such as iron, vitamin D, calcium, zinc, iodine and protein – all essential for strong bones, brain development and immunity.

Good nutrition begins in pregnancy, with mothers encouraged to focus on nutrient quality rather than food quantity. Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months provides the best start, followed by complementary foods rich in protein, whole grains, fruits, vegetables and healthy fats.

Fortified foods such as vitamin D or iron-enriched cereals can help close common nutritional gaps, while limiting processed snacks and sugary drinks can prevent poor eating habits from taking root early.

Lifestyle habits are equally important. Children need at least an hour of outdoor play daily, limited screen time and consistent sleep routines to support physical and mental development. Regular visits to government health clinics for growth monitoring, immunisations and developmental screenings ensure timely interventions when needed.

“Reduced physical activity, increased screen time and greater access to processed foods are fuelling undernutrition and overnutrition – two extremes that threaten Malaysia's health, education and productivity.”



Beyond malnutrition, tackling the realities of sedentary lifestyles, digital distractions, unbalanced diets and sleep deprivation is vital.
– BERNAMAPIC

National action

Schools play a key role in shaping health habits. The Health Ministry requires school canteens to follow strict nutrition guidelines, restricting excessive sugar and processed ingredients.

Coupled with daily physical education, nutrition lessons and routine growth checks, these measures can positively influence children's well-being.

At the national level, two major policy frameworks guide Malaysia's efforts: the National Plan of Action for Nutrition (NPANM III, 2016–2025) and the National Strategy to Combat Malnutrition (2023–2030). These initiatives promote breastfeeding, complementary feeding, food fortification and public nutrition education while also addressing childhood obesity and undernutrition.

Digital tools further strengthen these initiatives. The Growth Journey app, endorsed by the Malaysian Paediatric Association, allows parents to track growth trends and seek care early. Meanwhile, the Positive Parenting 360° Toolkit supports holistic monitoring of growth and developmental milestones.

Learning from global success

South Korea demonstrates the power of sustained national efforts. Once plagued by widespread malnutrition,

the country introduced school feeding schemes, national nutrition programmes and strong parental involvement.

By 2023, South Korean middle school boys were on average 7.4cm taller than a decade earlier while girls gained 3.3cm, proving that sustained commitment to child health brings measurable change.

Malaysia can adapt similar strategies while preserving its cultural diversity and local food traditions. Beyond malnutrition, tackling the realities of sedentary lifestyles, digital distractions, unbalanced diets and sleep deprivation is equally vital.

Ensuring every child in Malaysia has the chance to grow, learn and thrive will take a united effort from families, schools, communities and policymakers.

By combining balanced diets, healthier lifestyles, early monitoring and supportive national policies, we can raise a generation that is not only taller and stronger but also healthier, smarter and better prepared for the future.

Assoc Prof Dr Chee Seok Chiong, Assoc Prof Dr Neoh Siew Hong and Dr Lim Yin Sear are academics specialising in paediatrics at the School of Medicine, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, Taylor's University.
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Seeing urologist could save your life

► Breaking stigma around prostate check-ups

CONVERSATIONS about prostate health are often met with silence, hesitation or discomfort among Malaysian men. Despite increasing access to health information, many continue to put off seeing a urologist, especially for prostate-related concerns. The reasons are layered: stigma, uncertainty, fear of invasive procedures or the assumption that "it's probably nothing." But the data tells a different story.

Prostate cancer is now the third most-common cancer among Malaysian men, with nearly 70% of cases only detected at advanced stages. Broader gaps in men's health remain as well, as the Health Ministry has acknowledged that male health is still underserved in national policy. With men living nearly five years shorter than women on average, the cost of silence speaks volumes.

Fear, stigma, silence: Why do men delay seeing a urologist?

While women are generally introduced to reproductive health check-ups from a younger age, men are far less likely to engage in routine screenings. Many only seek help once symptoms become disruptive or difficult to ignore. For some, opening up about urinary or prostate health feels uncomfortably personal, while the idea of a physical examination can trigger anxiety or embarrassment.

There is an element of stoicism among men, where health issues are often brushed aside with the belief that they will resolve on their own. Many also believe they are not at risk - what we call low-perceived susceptibility - so they do not see their symptoms as abnormal or worth medical attention.

By the time they do start to appear, some would have already turned to the Internet for answers,

or tested out home remedies or supplements recommended by friends. These approaches might delay proper diagnosis and, in some cases, make the condition worse.

Cultural expectations also play a role. Men are often expected to appear strong, which makes talking about health issues such as prostate cancer harder, as it may seem too personal or uncomfortable.

Healthcare information is more accessible now, and that is slowly changing attitudes. But taboos around men's health still persist, and ultimately, the decision to seek treatment rests with the individual.

What happens during urology appointment

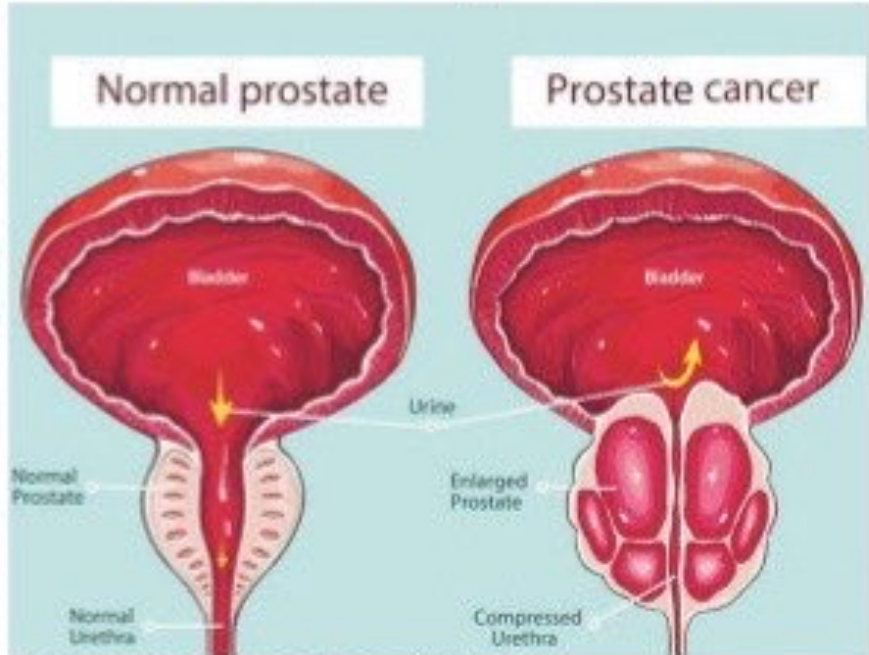
One of the biggest deterrents for men is simply not knowing what to expect. The term "prostate check" often evokes anxiety, largely because of its association with the digital rectal exam (DRE). Yet, modern urology consultations are far more discreet, professional and patient-focused than many realise.

A typical appointment begins with a conversation: Asking about symptoms, lifestyle and general health. If the prostate appears to be the main concern, the doctor will then focus on urinary patterns and risk factors.

If necessary - and always with the patient's consent - a physical exam may be performed, which can include a rectal exam to assess the size and consistency of the prostate gland.

While the DRE remains a useful diagnostic tool, it is not as daunting as they fear. During an appointment, the doctor always explains what will happen beforehand, and keeps the process as quick and gentle as possible. Most patients even walk away saying it was not nearly as uncomfortable as they had imagined.

Importantly, prostate care today extends well beyond physical exams. Depending on the case, doctors may recommend lab tests, imaging or specialised assessments. Besides just diagnosis, the goal is to build trust - and having a rapport with patients certainly helps.



Prostate cancer is the third most-common cancer among Malaysian men.

Rethinking prostate care

For years, prostate health was treated as an isolated issue. Yet the prostate is closely linked to broader aspects of men's health - from urinary function to sexual performance.

The prostate is part of the reproductive system. While treatment for prostate enlargement can sometimes lead to erectile dysfunction (ED), not all ED is prostate-related. Many men know the prostate affects urination and reproduction, but they do not always understand how it connects to overall health and quality of life. Problems with the prostate could lead to the infection of other bodily systems, if left untreated. Early warning signs should not be ignored. Slow urination, recurrent infections, waking up too often at night to urinate, or seeing blood in

the urine are all reasons to seek consultation.

Encouragingly, urology care itself has evolved. Medications are now more specific with fewer side effects, while surgical options are increasingly minimally invasive. Expanding on this, patient conversations around masculinity, urinary and vulnerability are being handled with more openness and sensitivity.

Making prostate care part of conversation

Ultimately, prostate care goes beyond just getting diagnosed - it is about empowering men to take charge of their health. Through public education and open dialogue, urology experts aim to normalise conversations around prostate health and encourage proactive care.

Malaysia currently has no national prostate cancer screening programme. However, men aged 45 to 55 - especially those with a family history - should consider early testing if they are otherwise healthy and expected to live another 10 years or more.

To those holding back out of fear or embarrassment, prostate diseases can be treated. The earlier it is diagnosed, the more options we have - often with minimal disruption to daily life. Early detection gives the best chance for effective treatment or even cure. Waiting too long can mean more invasive treatment or missing that window altogether.

This article is contributed by Sunway Medical Centre Danang and consultant urologist Dr Yeoh Wei Shien.

Malnutrition causes unrecognised 'type 5 diabetes', say experts



The most common form of diabetes is type 2.

MALNUTRITION can cause its own form of diabetes, health experts said recently, calling for 'type 5 diabetes' to be recognised globally to help fight the disease in countries already struggling with poverty and starvation.

The most common form of diabetes - type 2 - can be caused by obesity and occurs when adults become resistant to the hormone insulin. Type 1, mostly diagnosed in childhood, arises when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin.

But diabetes researchers have been tracking another form of the disease, which often appears in people aged under 30. It also affects insulin production but is less severe than type 1.

And rather than being linked to being overweight or obese like type 2, it affects people who are underweight because they do not eat enough.

A paper published in the medical journal *The Lancet Global Health* shows that more than 25 million people suffer from this 'type 5 diabetes', mostly in developing countries.

"We call upon the international diabetes community to recognise this distinct form of the disease," the authors wrote, reflecting a consensus reached by the International Diabetes Federation earlier this year.

The experts settled on calling this form of diabetes type 5, though types 3 and 4 have not been officially recognised.

Diabetes driven by malnutrition is not a new discovery - in the 1980s and 1990s, the World Health Organisation classified a form of "malnutrition-related diabetes".

But the UN agency abandoned this classification in 1999 due to a lack of agreement among experts

about whether undernourishment alone was enough to cause diabetes.

Since then, numerous studies in countries, including Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Uganda, Pakistan and Rwanda have indicated that this is possible.

The exact link between malnutrition and this strand of diabetes remains unknown. The efficacy of existing diabetes treatments that do not focus on weight loss on type 5 is also unclear.

The best way to fight the disease involves supporting programmes already working to combat poverty and hunger, the authors of the paper said.

This includes giving people access to low-cost, energy-dense staple foods high in protein and complex carbohydrates such as lentils, legumes, oil-enriched cereals and fortified grains, they added. -AFP



YOUR OPINION

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A pseudonym may be included.

IN recent years, we have seen important changes in Malaysia in relation to mental health, such as the effort to decriminalise suicide attempts and nationwide campaigns to reduce stigma. However, one critical issue remains unaddressed: insurance coverage.

While Malaysians who can afford it are well covered for chronic physical illnesses like diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, mental health conditions are often excluded or only minimally included in health insurance policies.

Only a few insurers provide protection for conditions like depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder, and they often have low annual caps. Most still do not include full benefits such as counselling, outpatient therapy, or wider mental health support.

This outdated view overlooks what the World Health Organisation (WHO) has repeatedly said: there is no health without mental health.

Families dealing with depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder frequently end up paying out-of-pocket for treatment, counselling, and medication. For many, these costs are too high, leaving conditions untreated – and untreated conditions can worsen, leading to lost productivity, family breakdowns, or, in tragic cases, preventable deaths.

World Mental Health Day is on Oct 10, and it should mark the moment Malaysia takes the important step of requiring all health insurance policies to cover mental health conditions equally with physical illnesses. Such a change would not just ease the financial burden on individuals and families but it would also send a clear message that mental

Include mental healthcare in all insurance plans



Photo: 123rf

health deserves equal dignity and attention as physical health.

Other countries have shown that this can work. Singapore's national insurance scheme, MediShield Life, began offering mental health coverage in 2021, and it includes psychiatric inpatient care as part of basic health protection. Australia's Medicare system allows patients to access up to 10 subsidised therapy sessions a year under a mental health treatment plan. The

United Kingdom's National Health Service guarantees free access to mental health services, treating psychological illnesses on par with physical ones.

The case for mandatory insurance coverage is not just ethical, it is also economic. The WHO estimates that depression and anxiety cost the global economy US\$1 trillion (RM4.2 trillion) each year in lost productivity. In Malaysia, mental health issues impact one in three people at some point in

their lives. If left untreated due to financial barriers, these conditions diminish workforce participation, weaken academic performance, and destabilise communities. Providing insurance coverage is therefore a smart investment in national resilience, not a financial burden.

Linking mental health coverage to insurance reform aligns with the government's broader agenda. The Madani Medical Scheme is modernising clinics, electronic

medical records are being implemented, and the Health White Paper sets the stage for long-term change for our healthcare system. Making mental health coverage mandatory would ensure consistency, making sure that progress is not dependent on political cycles or annual budget changes. It would also show that Malaysia is committed to integrating equity and compassion into the 13th Malaysia Plan (2026-2030).

As we mark World Mental Health Day this year, we should recognise that the next critical step in addressing mental health issues in Malaysia is to ensure access to care through insurance. No family should face a choice between financial security and mental wellbeing. No patient should feel that their mental illness is less important than a physical illness.

Making mental health coverage mandatory is not just a minor policy adjustment. It is a statement that Malaysia cares about the overall wellbeing of its people, that we are ready to invest in resilience, and that mental health is health, without question.

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Administration (Intan)

SURROUNDED by incubators, a red tube snaking into her tiny nose, four-day-old Grace-Ola is being fed donated breastmilk at the only facility in Kenya that offers the life-giving service.

The breastmilk bank at Pumwani Maternity Hospital is one of very few across sub-Saharan Africa, and is especially helpful for premature babies, of which roughly 124,000 are born each year in Kenya.

Mothers who give birth prematurely are often unable to produce breastmilk and must rely on formula, which can be less nutritious and increases the risk of infection, especially since water is often contaminated.

The milk bank in Nairobi, established in 2019 with the support of British aid money and PAFH, a non-governmental organisation, allows babies like Grace-Ola to benefit from the generosity of others.

"It was super-exciting," her mother, Margaret Adhiambo, 26, says and adds that she had not heard of the programme before she delivered prematurely at 30 weeks.

"Before I accepted, I was a sceptic, but because it gave me some feeling of quiet like I could not give my daughter my own breastmilk."

But "it helped me because my daughter didn't starve, at least she got some food".

'GOOD TO HELP'

Underweight babies face a daunting array of risks, and breastmilk can, quite literally, tip the scales in their favour.

"When we feed them human milk, we find they are growing faster compared to a baby who is getting formula," says Muthoni Ogega, the doctor heading the programme.

Kenya's only breastmilk bank a lifeline for preemies

Yet the World Health Organisation (WHO) says fewer than half of all infants worldwide are exclusively breastfed.

A key advantage of breastmilk is the antibodies passed to the infant, says Pumwani nurse Hannah Wanjau.

She moves with the efficiency needed for a maternity ward that cares for at least 50 mothers and babies at a time.

"We usually have many mothers lining up to receive the expressed breastmilk."

On a recent visit by AFP, she helped first-time mother Esther Wanjiru, 22, through the process of donating.

Wanjiru was given counselling and tests for diseases, including HIV and hepatitis, before sitting to pump her breastmilk.

The milk was then tested, both pre- and post-pasteurisation, and then frozen, allowing it to be stored for up to a year.

"It feels good to help... heart of feels like a message," Wanjiru says with a shy grin.

FUNDING SHORTFALL

For the hospital team, it is frustrating that they only have enough equipment



Underweight babies face a daunting array of risks, and breastmilk can, quite literally, tip the scales in their favour. **KEVIN KAMAU**

to provide milk to hospitalised children in the ward, as well as occasional donations to low-income, remote areas.

It is a much cheaper solution than formula, but the equipment is expensive, says hospital chief executive John



The breastmilk is tested, both pre- and post-pasteurisation, and then frozen, allowing it to be stored for up to a year. **KAREN LAMOT**

Christine Kibet

"Some of this equipment can only be found in Europe (or) the US, so it becomes a problem for us to procure." The hospital would love to help mothers out in the community, especially since

many live in informal settlements with no fridges or clean running water.

"That becomes one of the challenges that we experience right now — that we cannot help the mothers outside the facility," says Kibet.

AI model predicts future illnesses

SCIENTISTS have created an AI model able to predict medical diagnoses years in advance, building on the same technology behind consumer chatbots like ChatGPT.

Based on a patient's case history, the Delphi-2M AI "predicts the rates of more than 1,600 diseases" years into the future, the team from British, Danish, German and Swiss institutions wrote in a paper published in the *Nature* journal.

Researchers trained the model on data from Britain's UK Biobank — a large-scale biomedical research database with details on about half a million participants.

Neural networks based on so-called "transformer" architecture — the "T" in "ChatGPT" — are famously tasked with language-based tasks, as in the chatbot and its many imitators and competitors.

But understanding a sequence of medical diagnoses is "a bit like learning the grammar in a text," says German Cancer Research Center Albrecht von Gerstung.

Delphi-2M "learns the patterns in

healthcare data, preceding diagnoses, in which combinations they occur and which progression," he says, enabling "very meaningful and health-relevant predictions".

Gerstung presented charts suggesting the AI could single out people at higher or lower risk of suffering a heart attack than their age and other factors would predict.

The team verified Delphi-2M's performance by testing it against data from almost two million people in Germany's public health database.

But Gerstung and fellow team members stressed that the Delphi-2M

tool needed further testing and was not yet ready for clinical use.

"This is still a long way from improved healthcare as the authors acknowledge that both (British and Danish) datasets are biased in terms of age and socio-economic health care outcomes," says health technology researcher Peter Baresone, a fellow at Britain's Institution of Engineering and Technology.

But future systems like Delphi-2M could help "guide the monitoring and possibly earlier clinical interventions for effectively a preventative type of medicine," says Gerstung.



The AI model could single out people at high or low risk of suffering a heart attack from their age and other factors, it would predict. **• CNN NEWS 22 SEP — KPM**



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ADRENALIN

Pendorong Tindak Balas Tubuh

DALAM tubuh manusia, terdapat pelbagai hormon yang memainkan peranan penting dalam memastikan fungsi fisiologi berjalan dengan lancar. Salah satu hormon yang sangat penting, terutamanya dalam situasi kecemasan, ialah hormon adrenalin.

Hormon ini juga dikenali sebagai epinefrin dan dihasilkan oleh kelenjar adrenal yang terletak di atas buah pinggang. Perannya sangat kritikal dalam membantu tubuh bertindak balas dengan cepat apabila berdepan dengan situasi yang mencetuskan tekanan, dan/atau bahaya.

Hormon adrenalin dikenali sebagai hormon "lawan atau lari" kerana ia dirembeskan secara mendadak apabila seseorang berada dalam keadaan tertekan, takut, marah atau terancam. Sebagai contoh, jika seseorang hampir dilanggar oleh kereta, tubuh secara automatik akan merembeskan adrenalin. Kesan langsung hormon ini termasuk peningkatan kadar denyutan jantung, pernafasan menjadi lebih laju, tekanan darah meningkat, dan saluran udara dalam paru-paru mengembang. Semua ini berlaku agar lebih banyak oksigen dapat dibekalkan ke otot dan otak untuk bertindak dengan pantas.

Selain itu, hormon adrenalin juga menyebabkan hati memecah glukogen kepada glukosa, iaitu bentuk tenaga segera yang diperlukan oleh tubuh. Ini membolehkan seseorang bertindak balas dengan cepat, seperti berlari, menjent, atau melompat jauh apabila berada dalam keadaan bahaya. Keberkesanan hormon ini sangat penting dalam menyelamatkan nyawa ketika kecemasan.

Namun, sekiranya hormon adrenalin dirembeskan secara berlebihan dalam jangka masa panjang, ia boleh memberikan kesan negatif kepada kesihatan. Contohnya, seseorang yang sentiasa berada dalam keadaan tertekan atau cemas mungkin mengalami

peningkatan tekanan darah secara berterusan, degupan jantung yang tidak stabil, dan gangguan tidur. Keadaan ini boleh menyebabkan pelbagai penyakit seperti tekanan darah tinggi, serangan jantung, dan masalah kesihatan mental seperti kegelisahan.

Selain hormon yang berlebihan, kadar hormon adrenalin yang rendah dalam tubuh juga boleh memberikan kesan negatif seperti kemurungan, gangguan tidur, fibromyalgia, mudah penat, migrain, dan paras gula darah yang rendah.

Oleh itu, adalah penting untuk seseorang menguruskan tekanan dengan baik agar hormon adrenalin hanya diaktifkan apabila benar-benar diperlukan. Teknik relaksasi seperti senaman pernafasan, meditasi, dan gaya hidup sihat boleh membantu mengawal tahap hormon dalam tubuh dan mengelakkan kesan sampingan negatif.

Kesimpulannya, hormon adrenalin memainkan peranan penting dalam sistem pertahanan tubuh manusia. Ia membolehkan kita bertindak balas pantas dalam situasi berbahaya atau mencemaskan. Namun, pengurusan emosi dan tekanan harian yang bijak sangat penting supaya hormon ini tidak memberi kesan buruk kepada kesihatan dalam jangka masa panjang. Selamatkan emosi, jaga kesihatan, dan bijaklah mengurus tekanan untuk kesejahteraan tubuh secara menyeluruh.

