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MENTAL SICKNESS TO BE SECOND LARGEST SOURCE OF ILLNESS IN MALAYSIA BY 2020

Kangar, 29 June – Mental sickness is expected to be the second largest source of illness among Malaysians after cardiac disease by the year 2020.

The reported statistics are worrying as 400,227 sufferers in Malaysia required psychiatric help at government hospitals in 2008, an increase of 15.6 percent compared to previous years.

However, this may not reflect the actual number as many patients might choose to go untreated or place their trust instead in traditional medicine.

“Psychiatric health disorders are believed to contribute to the increase of psychiatric patients while local news reports of cases of suicide and intentional self-harm have increased likely due to depression and stress.

“If left untreated, chronic depression will cause hallucination and the tendency for self-harm or suicide,” said Head of Psychiatric Department and Specialist at Tuanku Fauziah Hospital (HTF) Dr Ruzita Jamaluddin when delivering her lecture entitled ‘Addressing the Stigma of Mental Illness’ during the Mental Health Awareness For UniMAP Department Heads Seminar at the Tuanku Syed Faizuddin Putra Library (PTSFP) Auditorium at the UniMAP Pauh Putra Main Campus yesterday.

Also present to deliver a talk entitled ‘Stress Management’ was HTF Psychiatric Specialist Dr. Zarina Zainan Abidin.

Dr. Ruzita added that the number people suffering from mental disorders are rising with 2000 new cases of schizophrenia reported each year.

She also urged people to discard their negative stigma and be accepting of these mental patients into society because they are only humans suffering from psychiatric health disorders.

“Proper treatment and medication could eventually restore them back to normal.

“Shunning and alienating them will not help them and will only worsen the patient's condition,” she said.

She also shared important facts about psychiatric patients that society especially family members and close acquaintances of the patients should be aware of.

She explained that early symptoms or the prodrome of the illness will take between several months to three years for it to manifest in a patient's mental, emotional and behavioural states.

“Be constantly aware of changes in thought, emotion and behaviour of family members, colleagues or even students in our institution as they might be struggling against such a malady.

“Early detection will help in the recovery of patients while an early diagnosis, medication and treatment would help them recuperate and reintegrate back to society,” she stated.

People must have a deeper understanding of mental illnesses before making negative assumptions and shun these patients from society.

Understanding and knowledge of mental illnesses would help in the early detection so the proper treatment can be immediately provided.

“The refusal of patients to consult with psychiatrists or to be associated with mental illnesses is caused by the negative perception of society on this issue.

“This would only aggravate the patient's condition and add to the reason for the rise in the number of psychiatric cases in the country.

“Eliminate the stigma and discrimination, and instead give your attention, love and support to them. It might not be easy, but it is not impossible to achieve,” she said.

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