



The **HEALTH**

PRIVATE
HEALTHCARE

Adapt, Innovate, Collaborate.

The recently-released Association of Private Hospitals of Malaysia (APHM) Factbook 2024 sheds light on the significant role these institutions play, detailing both their contributions and the challenges they face. **p08-09**

Traditional medicine for modern times

Golden Medical Award 2024 highlights TCM's growing role in Malaysia's healthcare system.

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A crisis looming

The urgent need for global awareness and action. **P17**

Targetted subsidies

A significant announcement was the end of universal and nearly free healthcare for all citizens. **P06-07**



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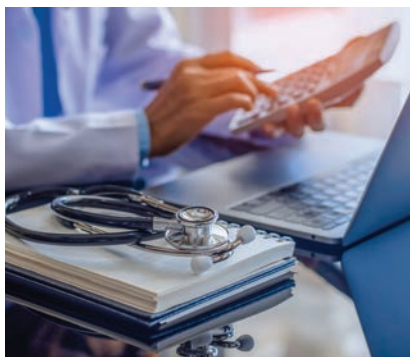
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The HEALTH says...

Investing in wellness

THE RECENT budget allocation of RM45.27 billion for Malaysia's Ministry of Health (MOH) in Budget 2025 has created a mix of hope and concern among healthcare workers and the public.

The 9.8 per cent increase from last year shows a commitment to improving the healthcare system, primarily through more funding for operational expenses and development expenses.

The rise in operational expenses, which includes salaries for healthcare professionals, suggests better job security and pay for medical staff, which is essential given the ongoing issues with contract employment and low allowances.

The proposed increase in on-call payments for medical officers, though still less than what many want, indicates that the government is starting to listen to healthcare workers' concerns. This shows a growing awareness of the challenges faced by healthcare providers and the need for better pay to retain skilled workers in the public sector.

Additionally, the RM1.5 billion set aside for building and upgrading healthcare facilities addresses the urgent need for better infrastructure, which has long affected the quality of services. Upgrading dilapidated facilities and ensuring that essential equipment is available can significantly improve patient care and staff morale.

However, there are criticisms about how the budget is structured and what it prioritises. The relatively small increase in development spending, compared to operational costs, raises worries about the long-term future of healthcare improvements. Without more investment in infrastructure and services, the healthcare system may struggle to meet future needs.

The introduction of targeted subsidies for higher-income earners, while meant to ease financial pressure on the healthcare system, could undermine Malaysia's commitment to universal healthcare. This change may leave lower-income individuals, who depend heavily on public services, feeling neglected and further exacerbate existing inequalities.

Moreover, while the budget provides funds for essential services and improvements, it needs to be clarified how effectively this money will be used. There is a history of budget funds not leading to real improvements due to bureaucratic delays and poor management.

The Prime Minister's call for ministries to focus on basic infrastructure is positive, but it needs to be supported by accountability measures to ensure these plans are effective. Without proper oversight, there is a risk that funds may not be appropriately allocated or wasted, failing to achieve their intended goals.

Additionally, the government's idea of outsourcing patient care to private facilities shows a creative approach to improving service delivery. This could relieve pressure on public hospitals while helping patients access necessary treatments more quickly.

However, careful planning and execution will be essential to maintain quality and fairness in care. Outsourcing must be managed to ensure that it does not compromise the standard of care provided to patients in public facilities.

While Budget 2025 includes several positive moves towards strengthening Malaysia's healthcare system, it also reveals ongoing challenges that need to be addressed. The balance between immediate operational needs and long-term development is critical.

Stakeholders in the healthcare sector, including government officials, medical professionals, and the public, must remain vigilant and engaged. Ensuring that the increased funding translates into meaningful improvements for healthcare workers and the patients, they serve is essential for the future health of the nation.

Columbia Asia's sustainable healthcare

COLUMBIA Asia, one of Malaysia's largest chains of private hospitals and part of Asia OneHealthcare (A1Health), has officially completed the installation of its solar panel system throughout nine hospitals across Malaysia, underscoring Columbia Asia's commitment to driving sustainable healthcare and advancing towards a greener environment.

The solar panel system, activated in partnership with a local solar energy company, has been generating renewable energy since

the installation began in December 2023.

Using solar cells that convert sunlight into electricity, this system produces 4.039 Gigawatt hours (GWh) of green energy each year - which is enough to light up 34,300 bulbs each year while significantly reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 2,505 tonnes. The system has also lived up to its cost-saving potential, generating a total of RM2.7 million in energy cost savings since the project began.

Columbia Asia Support Service Vice President Mohd Kamarul Salleh said: "At Columbia Asia,



Columbia Asia Support Service Vice President Mohd Kamarul Salleh (far right), pictured with his team.

we're always looking for innovative ways to improve our patient care.

"This solar panel system not only helps us reduce our environmental impact but also allows us to reinvest in upgrading our facilities and services, ensuring that our patients receive the best possible care."

The solar panel construction

project was rolled out in two phases, equipping 11 buildings across nine hospitals nationwide. These include the pilot project in Columbia Asia Hospital - Iskandar Puteri followed by other Columbia Asia hospitals in Tebrau, Setapak, Cheras, Petaling Jaya, Bukit Rimau, Klang, Seremban, and Taiping.

SJMC and PMC announce partnership

SUBANG Jaya Medical Centre (SJMC), a leading private tertiary hospital in Malaysia, has announced a strategic partnership with Public Medicare Group (PMG), one of Malaysia's largest local primary healthcare providers.

This collaboration aims to enhance healthcare delivery in Malaysia, improve healthcare outcomes, and strengthen the nation's overall well-being.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between both parties will establish a seamless pathway where patients can access primary and tertiary care across East and West Malaysia, ensuring continuity of treatment and optimal patient outcomes.

SJMC Chief Executive Officer Bryan Lim said: "We are pleased to partner with Public Medicare Group (PMG) to deliver quality healthcare that extends beyond regional boundaries. We are eager to collaborate to combine our resources and expertise as we take this significant step towards creating a more equitable healthcare system in Malaysia."

PMG, which began in Sarikei, Sarawak, has grown to include over 180 entities across East and West Malaysia. It consistently provides a wide range of primary healthcare services, including pharmacies,



(From Left): SJMC Director of Business Development, Strategy, and Transformation Joanne Lee; SJMC Chief Executive Officer Bryan Lim; PMG Founder and Executive Chairman Dr Chieng King Chong; and PMG Executive Director Andrew Wong.

medical clinics, and dental services. The partnership will strengthen the healthcare network for professionals and patients of both organisations, ensuring broader access to healthcare services.

PMG Founder and Executive Chairman Dr Chieng King Chong said: "Through this partnership with Subang Jaya Medical Centre (SJMC), we aim to establish a comprehensive and seamless referral pathway for our patients. Our goal is to create a bridge that links PMG's primary care services with SJMC's renowned expertise in secondary and tertiary care. This will ensure that our patients receive the right care at the right time, without any delays."

Eye health event promotes wellness

IN celebration of World Sight Day, Johnson & Johnson Vision Care Malaysia (J&J Vision Care) hosted a successful Eye Health Screening event, themed "Know Your Eyes In and Out", at Johnson & Johnson Sdn Bhd (J&J) Pinnacle office.

The initiative aimed to raise awareness about eye health while providing free screenings to employees using cutting-edge AI-powered instruments. The event attracted a total of 90 registered participants, with an additional 16 walk-ins, culminating in 86 individuals screened throughout the day.

The event was marked by engaging programmes that included an opening speech by J&J Vision Care Business Unite Lead Goh Kok How, and a keynote address delivered virtually by Moi Yuan from the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) in Korea.

Participants were educated about various eye health issues through a professional development session titled "Eye Care 101," presented by J&J Vision Care Professional Education Specialist Uma Mageswari Batumalai.

Additionally, an HR session highlighted the eye care benefits available to employees, emphasising the importance of regular

eye examinations.

The screening process was comprehensive, featuring preliminary checks, refraction measurements, intraocular pressure assessments, dry eye evaluations, and retinal imaging with AI diagnosis. This thorough approach underscored the event's commitment to promoting eye health awareness.

Adding an element of fun, the event included an entertainment corner with a game booth focusing on eye-hand coordination and a donation booth for the "Sight For Kids" initiative.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with an impressive average rating of 4.71 out of 5. Attendees expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to learn about eye health and the resources available to them, highlighting the event's significant impact on raising awareness within the employee community.

Looking ahead, J&J Vision Care are eager to build on this momentum. Plans for future eye health events are already underway, driven by the high interest and positive feedback received. There is also a commitment to exploring additional partnerships to enhance educational resources and support for employees.

Set for significant growth

THE global market for myopia and presbyopia treatments was projected to expand by US\$9.76 billion from 2024 to 2028, as reported by Technavio.

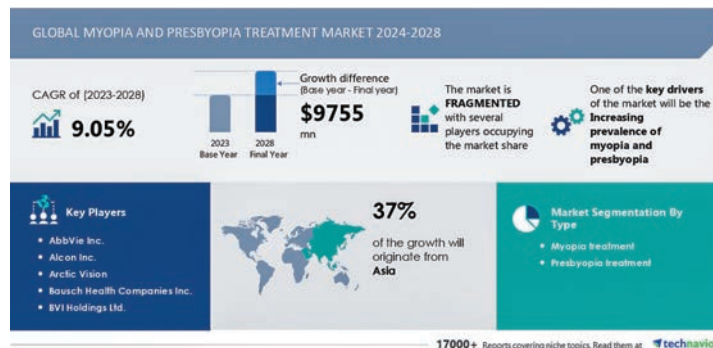
This growth, estimated at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.05 per cent, was primarily driven by the increasing prevalence of these vision conditions and recent advancements in treatment options.

Recent developments in the industry underscored the rising demand for effective solutions. Innovations from key players notably spurred the market's growth.

In June 2022, Johnson & Johnson launched the ACUVUE OASYS MAX 1-Day and ACUVUE OASYS MAX 1-Day MULTIFOCAL contact lenses, which provided enhanced comfort and clarity. Additionally, their TECNIS Synergy Toric II intraocular lens, known for its rotational stability, and the CATALYS System COS 6.0 software for astigmatism management were introduced to the market.

NIDEK Co. Ltd. also made strides with its Retina Scan Duo 2, a combined OCT and fundus camera system launched in October 2021, which improved clinical efficiency.

Essilor made headlines with the introduction of Stelless, a new



type of spectacle lens designed to slow myopia progression in children, which received Breakthrough Device designation from the US FDA in May 2021. Such product launches were expected to enhance market adoption and foster competitiveness among manufacturers.

The market also grappled with substantial challenges, particularly the high costs associated with many treatment options. Financial barriers posed by expensive glasses, contact lenses, and surgical procedures like LASIK and PRK have limited access for many patients. This situation was exacerbated by the need for ongoing pre-and post-operative care, which further increased the financial burden on individuals seeking vision correction.

Demographic factors contributed to the market's dynamics, with elderly populations particularly impacted by age-related

vision issues. Conditions such as glaucoma, cataracts, and digital eye strain from prolonged screen exposure drove demand for various treatments, including corneal inlays and implantable contact lenses. Surgical options, including conductive keratoplasty and LASEK, remained popular among those seeking permanent solutions.

Despite the challenges, advancements in technology such as telemedicine, gene therapy, and stem cell therapy were emerging trends that promised to improve access to care.

However, the high costs associated with treatments continued to pose significant obstacles, potentially hindering market growth in the coming years. As the landscape evolved, the focus on eye care remained critical, with vision impairment and eye pressure issues highlighted as major health concerns.

High-level meeting on tuberculosis



INDONESIA recently hosted a High-Level Meeting, where leaders and experts in tuberculosis (TB) convened to discuss strategies, innovations, and achievements in the global fight against the disease.

The full-day session brought together a distinguished group of global stakeholders dedicated to addressing and eliminating the TB pandemic.

The meeting featured a series of expert panels that provided comprehensive analyses of the current state of TB, alongside forward-looking strategies prioritising groundbreaking solutions in treatment, diagnostics, and vaccine development.

Representing TB Alliance were President and Chief Executive Officer Dr Mel Spigelman, Senior Vice President (R&D) Dr Eugene Sun, and Senior Vice President (Market Access) Sandeep Juneja, who spoke on panels addressing the transformation of TB research and development (R&D) and the accelerated rollout of TB drugs worldwide.

During the High-Level Meeting, Dr Spigelman announced that TB Alliance is pioneering a transformative "one by one" approach to TB treatment. The goal is to treat latent TB infections in one day and to treat active TB in one month.

"This ambitious vision aims to simplify TB care dramatically, making treatment faster and more manageable for all people with TB."

He added that this vision, built on the latest scientific breakthroughs, offers a path forward to contribute to the elimination of TB while easing the treatment journey for millions.

Dr Eugene Sun emphasised the importance of innovation in the mission to end TB.

"TB Alliance's R&D strategy focuses on identifying and developing new cures that simplify treatment by making it shorter, easier to administer, and more effective.

"Our objective is to save lives by advancing science. With bold, people-centred solutions, we can redefine what is possible in TB care and accelerate the end of this devastating disease."

GenScript Biotech sets up new hub

GENSCRIPT Biotech Corporation (GenScript), a global leader in life sciences services and products, has announced the establishment of new operations site and logistics centre in Sydney, Australia.

This strategic expansion represents a significant milestone in GenScript's continued commitment to supporting the rapid growth of the biotechnology sector in Australia.

It also underscores the company's determination to strengthen GenScript's presence in the Asia-Pacific region and globally, advancing innovative solutions that address the evolving needs of the industry.

The new Sydney facility will significantly enhance GenScript's ability to serve customers across the region, ensuring faster and more efficient delivery of research

reagents and products.

With a local presence, Australian researchers and biotech companies will no longer need to navigate the complexities of permit applications, customs clearance, and tax payments, streamlining the procurement process, and allowing them to focus on advancing their groundbreaking research and innovation.

A key highlight of the Sydney site is the introduction of next-day shipping for high-demand products such as off-the-shelf mRNA, growth factors, Cas proteins, and more. This expedited service ensures that researchers and biotech companies can access essential materials with unprecedented speed, accelerating their scientific discoveries and development efforts.



GenScript's rotating Chief Executive Officer Sherry Shao commented on the expansion: "Establishing a logistics hub in Sydney enables us to deliver more localised support to our Australian partners. We see this as more than just an operational expansion - it's about building long-term relationships within the region's biotech ecosystem.

"By removing import barriers and offering next-day delivery on key products, we are helping our customers focus entirely on advancing their research without the logistical challenges that previously existed."

Targetted subsidies

A significant announcement was the end of universal and nearly free healthcare for all citizens



THE Health Ministry has been allocated RM45.3bil, the second highest under Budget 2025, an increase from the RM41.2bil allocated under Budget 2024.

As part of the government's 'war on sugar', Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim also announced that excise duties on sugar-sweetened beverages will be raised by 40 sen per litre starting Jan 1, 2025.

The funds collected from the excise duties are meant to be used for the treatment and procurement of medicine supplies.

A total of RM1.35 billion is allocated to upgrade dilapidated healthcare facilities, including rundown wards and toilets, and RM300 million for upgrades and repairs to dilapidated clinics.

Meanwhile, RM25mil will be set aside for the Rakan KKM programme to be conducted at five hospitals that are in high demand.

Aside from that, RM100 million was allocated to healthcare facilities that



BY HARVINDAR SINGH

Council member
Chartered Tax
Institute of Malaysia

serve as centres of excellence, such as Serdang Hospital, National Cancer Institute, and Kuala Lumpur Hospital, among others. The government has also allocated RM25 million for rare disease treatments.

A significant announcement in Budget 2025 was the end of universal and nearly free health care for all citizens, as the government seeks to have targeted subsidies for healthcare.

There were no specific details, however, of how much more the top 15 per cent (T15) of income earners would be required to pay to access healthcare at public healthcare facilities under the MOH beyond the current RM1 and RM5 fees for outpatient and specialist care, respectively.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

In managing the expectations of the rakyat when it comes to healthcare, it was announced that existing patients can continue treatment at the National Heart Institute (IJN) and those aged 65 years and older, particularly, can stay at IJN.

It is to be noted that so far this year, IJN has discharged about 4,000 government patients covered by MOH from outpatient services. Many government pensioners have complained about their discharge from IJN and referrals to public hospitals.

As for tax reliefs for medical expenses for individuals, the following measures have been proposed in Budget 2025

- Expansion of the relief to cover diagnostic tests and purchase of health check devices and test kits.
- Individual income tax reliefs for payment of medical and education insurance premiums increased to RM4,000.
- Individual income tax reliefs for medical expenditures up to RM10,000 also cover medical payments for medical and health insurance/ takaful with copayment features.

Malaysia's medium-term health expenditure growth is among the fastest in ASEAN. The ageing population, the growing burden of chronic diseases,



and efforts to enhance public health infrastructure and improve access for underserved communities are driving public sector growth.

Private healthcare providers will continue to attract patients with higher incomes, including medical tourists and domestic patients looking to avoid long waiting times amid Malaysia's shortage of physicians and nurses.

Malaysia's high single-digit expenditure growth will see it outpace regional peers such as Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia over the medium term.

Additionally, annual per capita health expenditure remains above global and emerging market averages, indicating a solid capacity for spending on advanced medical products.

Malaysia will continue developing its healthcare offering to attract medical tourists but will face regional solid competition from Thailand and Singapore.

ATTRACTIVE DESTINATION

Malaysia remains an attractive destination for foreign healthcare patients with its availability of high-quality healthcare facilities equipped with modern medical products alongside cost-effective healthcare.

In February 2024, KPJ Healthcare, which operates 29 hospitals in Malaysia, announced that two of its hospitals had joined the Mayo Clinic care network.

The collaboration will enhance the healthcare services provided by the hospitals by leveraging Mayo Clinic's knowledge and expertise. It will help to attract patients seeking advanced medical care, supporting demand for healthcare services and medical products.

Hospitals will use digital health

“Private healthcare providers will continue to attract patients with higher incomes, including medical tourists and domestic patients looking to avoid long waiting times amid Malaysia's shortage of physicians and nurses.”

tools to promote individualised care through Mayo Clinic's point-of-care database, which includes clinical information on medical conditions.

At the same time, physicians will be able to use live video conferences to discuss cases with other doctors in the Mayo Clinic network.

This latest partnership follows one signed between private companies Sunway Healthcare Group, which is based in Malaysia, and PT JCB International Indonesia, a subsidiary of JCB International, in January 2024 to attract medical tourists from Indonesia.

We expect partnerships will remain a feature of Malaysia's efforts to enhance its medical tourism industry as it seeks to stay competitive amid solid regional competition.

Competition is coming from markets such as Thailand and Singapore. Medical tourists from both developed and emerging markets visit Singapore for a range of health services, including health screenings, cardiology and oncology services and orthopaedic procedures.

However, Singapore may increasingly struggle to compete with Malaysia and Thailand in terms of offering affordable costs for specific

procedures. It could increasingly target patients seeking more complicated procedures or those from developed markets with higher incomes as a result.

Thailand recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Saudi Arabia to attract medical tourists.

DEVELOPED MARKETS

At the same time, the Thai government also relaxed medical visas in 2023 to make healthcare more accessible for international patients, reducing the cost of visas and increasing the amount of time patients can remain in the country.

Creating a more inclusive healthcare system through improving system access in rural parts of the country and integrating digital health remains a priority, and measures to this end were announced in Budget 2025.

Malaysia will continue to address accessibility challenges in rural areas with the government's 2025 budget highlighting investments in health facilities, including expanding hospitals and building new health clinics to increase capacity and reduce overcrowding.

Digital health tools will continue to play a critical role in addressing Malaysia's urban-rural disparities. In May 2024, broadband provider MEASAT and Malaysia-based health technology company Mudah Healthtech announced an MoU to introduce 2,000 Sihat Xpress telehealth kiosks to rural doctors.

The kiosks will enable doctors to conduct online consultations with patients for non-urgent medical issues, as well as health checks such as body temperature, blood pressure and blood glucose levels.

The government is also aiming for a nationwide rollout of electronic medical records by 2026 in a bid to improve the efficiency of the healthcare system.

Healthcare personnel shortages will continue posing challenges to the healthcare system. Despite Malaysia enhancing its healthcare system, the Malaysian government has yet to meet its target of one doctor to 400 patients, and this will pose the most significant challenge in rural settings.

The country currently has a shortage of physicians and nurses, with the numbers for both below the global median. Malaysia's personnel shortages are most acute in the public sector, and this will lead to increasing collaboration with the private sector to help address the issue.

Health Minister Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad recently highlighted that collaborations between the public and private sector will be necessary for overcoming staff shortages, and the Minister has recently supported the signing of an MoU for nursing scholarships that will enhance nursing education in Malaysia. - **The HEALTH**

Private healthcare ecosystem

Understanding the multifaceted impact of private hospitals in Malaysia

BY KHIRTINI K KUMARAN

THE healthcare landscape in Malaysia is undergoing a significant transformation, with private hospitals emerging as crucial players in delivering quality medical care and driving economic growth.

The recently-released Association of Private Hospitals of Malaysia (APHM) Factbook 2024, 'Evolving Landscape of the Private Healthcare System in Malaysia: Contributions, Challenges, and Recommendations', shed light on the significant role these institutions play, detailing both their contributions and the challenges they face.

APHM President Datuk Dr Kuljit Singh expressed the significance of the newly-released factbook: "I am delighted to present the inaugural factbook of the APHM. This comprehensive publication provides detailed insights into the contributions made by the Private Hospital Sector to the nation, the issues it encounters, and recommendations for future progress."

As the healthcare system evolves, private hospitals must deal with financial, regulatory, and market challenges to keep operating and improve patient care. Understanding these insights is crucial for guiding future healthcare initiatives in Malaysia.

VITAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Minister of Health Malaysia Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad highlighted the importance of the private healthcare sector in complementing public services.

"The private hospital sector significantly contributes to Malaysia's GDP. This sector plays a crucial role in complementing public hospitals, especially in urban settings."

This partnership is vital in fostering a cohesive healthcare ecosystem that prioritises patient welfare.

According to the Factbook, private hospitals not only bolster the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but also enhance healthcare delivery, innovation, and community well-being.

● Economic Impact

In 2023, private hospitals contributed around RM6 billion to Malaysia's GDP. Although this is less than one per cent



Datuk Dr Kuljit Singh

"The private hospital sector significantly contributes to Malaysia's GDP. This sector plays a crucial role in complementing public hospitals, especially in urban settings."

- Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad



of the national GDP, it is essential when considering the sector's broader economic influence. The private hospital industry employs about 45,000 people, making it one of the most productive sectors in the country. Additionally, the indirect economic impact of private hospitals is estimated at RM12 billion, generated through connections with various industries like pharmaceuticals, medical devices, diagnostics, tourism, and insurance.

This interconnectedness highlights that private hospitals are not just healthcare providers but also economic drivers that create jobs and support related industries. Their operations strengthen the overall economy, making them essential to Malaysia's financial landscape.

● Quality Healthcare

Private hospitals are valued for their ability to provide high-quality care and prompt medical services. The sector has made significant advances by investing in modern technologies, such as robotic surgery and personalised treatments. These innovations have improved patient outcomes and contributed around RM11 billion to GDP by reducing the burden of disease and enhancing quality of life.

The adoption of modern medical technologies has been a game changer, particularly in reducing the duration of inpatient stays and accelerating

access to healthcare services. Collaborations with public healthcare channels further optimise resource allocation, ensuring that patients receive comprehensive care in a streamlined healthcare environment.

● Public Health Equity

Private hospitals are at the forefront of promoting public health equity through various initiatives. Their involvement in clinical trials, health screening programmes, and public-private partnerships shows their commitment to enhancing access to healthcare. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the critical need for such collaborations, demonstrating how private entities can effectively support national health initiatives.

As Malaysia seeks to improve health outcomes across its population, the opportunities for scaling these partnerships are vast. By leveraging digital integration, private hospitals can extend their services, making healthcare more accessible and equitable for all Malaysians.

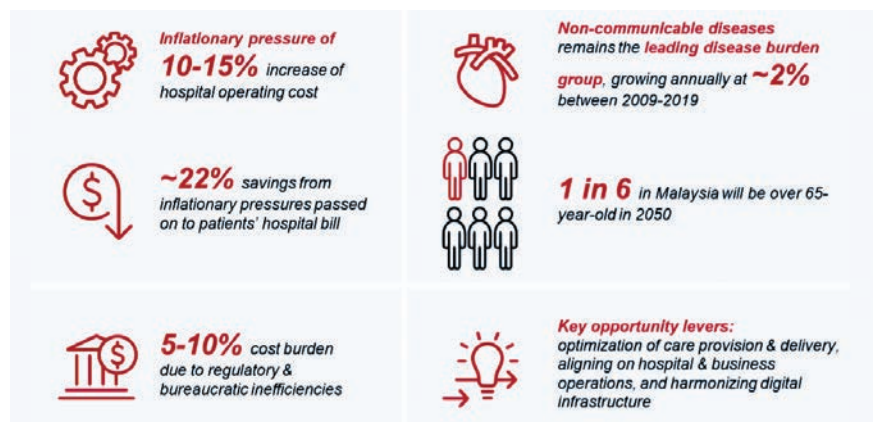
● CSR and ESG Initiatives

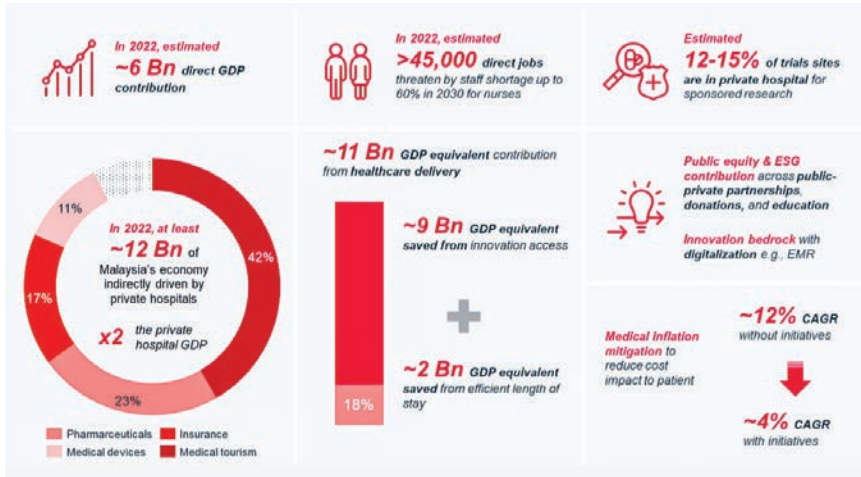
The commitment of private hospitals to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles is evident in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts. These initiatives include scholarships and educational funds aimed at addressing the talent shortage in healthcare, as well as philanthropic contributions of medical equipment to public hospitals.

Such actions demonstrate that private hospitals are not merely profit-driven entities; they are also dedicated to enhancing community well-being. By prioritising ethical practices and sustainability, these institutions contribute to a healthier society and foster a sense of responsibility within the healthcare sector.

● Mitigating Medical Inflation

Amidst global economic challenges, private hospitals have implemented effective cost-containment measures to mitigate medical inflation. These initiatives, ranging from procurement excellence and prudent medical practices to leveraging technology for operational efficiencies, have been instrumental in limiting the





increase in healthcare costs to patients. From 2020 to 2023, overall healthcare costs for patients rose about four per cent per year, significantly lower than the predicted 12 per cent if inflation had fully impacted the sector.

This proactive approach not only alleviates the financial burden on patients but also underscores the sector's commitment to maintaining affordable healthcare while ensuring financial sustainability.

NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

The Factbook also delves into the challenges that threaten its sustainability and growth, offering a comprehensive overview of the obstacles faced by private hospitals in a rapidly evolving healthcare ecosystem.

● Business Continuity and Financial Sustainability

In the years spanning 2020 to 2023, private hospitals have faced significant inflation, with operating costs rising by 10-15 per cent annually. This increase is mainly due to supply chain issues, difficulties in retaining staff, and the declining value of the Malaysian ringgit, which raises the costs of medical supplies, drugs, and labour. Despite these challenges, private hospitals have managed to keep patient healthcare costs stable, reflecting successful cost-containment strategies that have resulted in around 22 per cent savings passed on to hospital bills.

However, concerns remain about the long-term sustainability of these measures. Balancing high-quality care

with financial viability is a significant challenge. With operating margins of 10-15 per cent, there is an urgent need to diversify revenue sources beyond traditional methods like medical tourism and elective procedures. The pressure to invest in technology while providing emergency services highlights the precarious nature of financial sustainability in this sector.

● Regulatory Challenges

The complexity of regulatory approvals is another significant hurdle for the private healthcare sector. On average, the approval process for project expansions or licence renewals takes at least a year. This lengthy timeline adds 5-10 per cent to investment costs and slows down hospitals' ability to adapt to market changes.

Upcoming policies, such as medicine price controls and new medical malpractice regulations, add further complications. Streamlining bureaucratic processes could significantly benefit the sector by improving operations and efficiency through quicker decision-making. Harmonising regulations across states is also important, especially for larger hospital groups operating in multiple areas.

● Shifting Market Demand and Consumer Expectations

The changing healthcare needs of Malaysians present additional challenges. A rising number of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and an ageing population require new service delivery models. With the government

“As the healthcare system continues to evolve, the commitment to value-based care will remain vital, ensuring that the health and well-being of the Malaysian population are central to all initiatives.”

investing RM 40 billion in preventative care and digitalisation in its 2024 health plan, private hospitals must adjust their services to meet these new priorities.

Additionally, as consumers become wealthier, their expectations for healthcare services are changing. Patients now want personalised care and advanced technological solutions, pushing private hospitals to innovate constantly. Furthermore, competition from neighbouring countries improving their healthcare offerings threatens Malaysia's medical tourism revenue, compelling private hospitals to differentiate themselves by tailoring services to meet these evolving demands.

● Integration within the Healthcare Ecosystem

A significant opportunity for private hospitals lies in overcoming integration challenges within the more extensive healthcare system. As healthcare delivery becomes increasingly interconnected, effective collaboration among all stakeholders - from care providers to insurers and regulators - is essential for optimising resources and improving patient care.

Enhancing integration can lead to a more coordinated response to market demands, resulting in more efficient healthcare delivery. By aligning hospital operations and standardising digital systems, private hospitals can better position themselves to tackle the challenges of a changing healthcare landscape.

THE WAY FORWARD

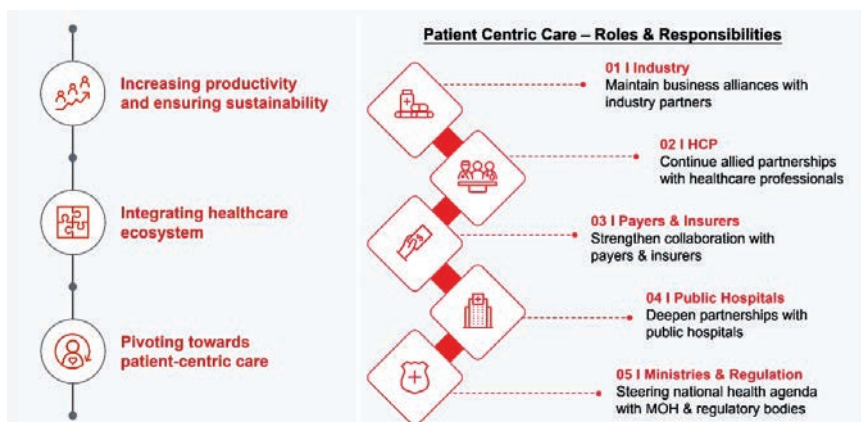
The future of Malaysia's private hospital sector depends on its ability to adapt to the changing healthcare environment. By focusing on improving productivity, fostering integration within the healthcare system, and prioritising patient-centred care, private hospitals can emerge as leaders in providing high-quality, accessible healthcare.

Government support will be crucial in this effort, providing the necessary framework for innovation and ensuring that all Malaysians have fair access to healthcare.

As the healthcare system continues to evolve, the commitment to value-based care will remain vital, ensuring that the health and well-being of the Malaysian population are central to all initiatives.

The future of healthcare in Malaysia will rely on the capacity of private hospitals to adapt, innovate, and collaborate, ultimately providing excellent care for every patient. - **The HEALTH**

“Upcoming policies, such as medicine price controls and new medical malpractice regulations, add further complications. Streamlining bureaucratic processes could significantly benefit the sector by improving operations and efficiency through quicker decision-making.”





Empowering the pros

Insights from the MMA forum on reforming doctor remunerations for a sustainable future

BY KHIRTINI K KUMARAN

A RECENT medical forum in Kuching addressed the historical context of remunerations for doctors, their impact on healthcare delivery, and the urgent need for timely revisions to ensure a level playing field for doctors across Malaysia.

The forum, hosted by the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA), was titled 'Fee Schedule: Reforming Doctor's Remunerations for a Sustainable Healthcare'.

Through insightful discussions and interactive audience participation, the forum highlighted the pressing challenges faced by medical practitioners and the importance of reform for the sustainability of the healthcare system.

The event was part of the National MMA Convention & Scientific Congress 2024 and the 64th MMA Annual General Meeting, bringing together key stakeholders to address the complexities of the Doctors' Fee Schedule and the pressing need for its reform.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Opening the discussion, the Ministry of Health's (MoH) Medical Practice Division Head, Dr Mohamed Iqbal Hamzah, clarified the concept of a 'fee schedule'.

"The fee schedule is to look into the proper, the right payment to be paid by the patient to the doctors. Every profession has a standard fee."

The impetus for regulating medical fees began in 2005 when the then Health Minister mandated the establishment of a fee structure for medical practitioners. This regulation aimed to create a standardised payment system, ensuring fairness for both doctors and patients.

MMA Honorary General Secretary Dr Vasu Pillai Letchumanan provided a historical overview of the fee schedules: "When we first released the fee schedule in 1997, it was for reference. It is not compulsory to follow that, but it was a guideline for doctors."

He elaborated that subsequent edi-



tions, particularly the fourth edition known as the 13th fee schedule for specialists, were incorporated into the Medical Act in 2010. However, significant delays in updating the 7th fee schedule for general practitioners (GPs) have left many in the field feeling undervalued.

"The GP fee schedule has been pending for review and deregulation for years," he noted, highlighting the MMA's advocacy for deregulation that was announced but not implemented after a change in government in 2020.

IMPACT ON GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

Representing GPs, MMA President-elect Datuk Dr Thirunavukarasu Rajoo stated: "The biggest victim of this entire inefficiency in the system of fee scheduling is the GPs."

He pointed out that the consultation fees, which were last gazetted in 2006, were based on rates established back in 1992, ranging from RM10 to RM35.

"This means there's a lapse of 32 years," he noted, urging the government to recognise the importance of GPs in the healthcare system.

"If they want to enhance primary care, they need to invest in the existing infrastructure of 11,000 GPs," he insisted, emphasising that rising costs necessitate a re-evaluation of fee structures to promote preventive care.

FEE SCHEDULING

Representing the Society of Private Medical Practitioners Sarawak, Dr Liew Shan Fap reinforced the critical nature of a structured fee schedule: "Medical healthcare is a profession, not an industry. The fee schedule ensures fair healthcare access."

He warned that without a transparent fee structure, the potential for overcharging could lead to underservice in private healthcare, pushing patients towards government facilities.

"If fees are too low, it leads to underservice as doctors may seek alternatives due to lack of incentive," he cautioned,

advocating for a balanced approach that would allow for fair compensation while maintaining accessible healthcare.

MMA President Dato' Dr Kalwinder Singh Khaira echoed these sentiments, asserting that the MMA represents a significant number of doctors who feel disadvantaged compared to other professions.

"Doctors are supposed to be righteous people and do service, but they also have to earn a living." He highlighted the need for harmonisation between the 7th and 13th fee schedules, calling it a 'low-lying fruit' that could be quickly addressed.

"There must be a system in place for regular reviews every three to five years," he suggested, emphasising the need to avoid long gaps that leave the fee structure stagnant.

THIRD-PARTY ADMINISTRATORS

The discussion also touched on the role of third-party administrators (TPAs) in the fee scheduling system.

Specialist representative Dr Gunalan Palari pointed out that while a consistent fee schedule ensures uniformity across the country, it can also lag behind advancements in medical procedures.

"The last fee schedule we had with a 14.4 per cent increment was in 2013," he said, highlighting that the procedures listed were all from 2006 to 2008.

There were only new procedures listed once the exercise was completed in 2021 when about 1,500 new procedures were added.

"But by the time we gazetted these new procedures in 2025, we will have fallen behind again."

He called for a more dynamic approach that allows for the incorporation of new technologies and procedures into the fee schedule. Association of Private Hospitals of Malaysia (APHM) President Datuk Dr Kuljit Singh highlighted the complications that arise when rigid fee schedules bind doctors.

"If the fee schedule is too low, doctors may not want to perform certain procedures," he warned.

This rigidity can often result in patients being referred elsewhere for necessary care, which ultimately hampers the quality of care provided within the private sector.

"In a litigious environment, if a procedure is not in the fee schedule and a doctor charges differently, it can lead to legal issues," he explained, underscoring the need for an updated fee structure that reflects current medical practices.

As the forum concluded, a clear consensus emerged regarding the urgent need for reform in Malaysia's medical fee scheduling.

The MMA looks forward to facilitating further discussions, aiming to address these critical issues within Malaysia's healthcare landscape and ensuring that doctors can provide high-quality care while receiving fair compensation for their services. - **The HEALTH**

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Traditional medicine for modern times

Golden Medical Award 2024 highlights TCM's growing role in Malaysia's healthcare system

BY ZAFIRAH ZAFRUDDIN

DESPITE advances in modern medicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) principles and practices still offer significant benefits. In Malaysia, TCM has been officially recognised by the Ministry of Health (MOH), underscoring its value in the healthcare system.

To celebrate the achievements of outstanding practitioners and businesses in the field, the third Golden Medical Award was held. The ceremony took place in Kuala Lumpur on Oct 21, 2024.

Organised by the Federation of Chinese Physicians & Acupuncturists Associations Malaysia (FCPAAM), the Golden Medical Award was first held in 2018. A successful second edition followed this in 2019.

The third edition took place after an extended gap caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

FCPAAM President Prof Dr Ng Po Kok stated: "This year's Golden Medical Award feels especially meaningful."

He commended the many TCM practitioners who, despite the challenging times, continued to serve patients with unwavering dedication. Their resilience was evident, especially when numerous TCM-related clinics and businesses were on the verge of closing during the pandemic.

Ng reflected on the strong advocacy efforts of political parties, the Chinese League, and TCM organisations. Their joint efforts made it possible for TCM practitioners to continue serving patients, even amidst the peak of the pandemic.

The incident underscored the crucial need for TCM to be included in national healthcare programmes. This inclusion would ensure that its practitioners and services are better supported, particularly in times of crisis.

MOVING FORWARD

The FCPAAM President also spoke on the enforcement of the Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM) Act 2016 (Act 775) by the MOH.

"Activities related to the enforcement and legal proceedings against unlicensed T&CM practitioners have started since Aug 1, 2024.

"Starting Mar 1, 2025, practitioners who violate the Act will be subject to legal action."

This change marks the beginning of



Ng Po Kok delivering the opening speech.



Omega Pork Noodle Sdn Bhd proudly accepts the prestigious Chinese Herbal Cuisine & Health Culture Award.



Ng Po Kok

stricter professional standards in the TCM sector.

"The role of TCM organisations has never been more critical, now that the industry is held to the same regulatory standards as Western medicine," Ng remarked.

Although these regulations are a step in the right direction, TCM still lacks the recognition and acceptance of Western medicine.

Naturally, this means TCM practitioners do not receive the same institutional support available to Western medical professionals.

The need for increased government support is further underscored by the oversight of TCM in Malaysia's Budget 2025. Many advocated for the establishment of a TCM hospital, seeing it as



Group photo of the honourees.



essential for the field's development.

A dedicated TCM hospital would not only expand healthcare options for the public but can also serve as a training centre for TCM practitioners. The absence of financial support in the budget is truly a missed opportunity to strengthen TCM's role in the healthcare system.

Ng also advised TCM practitioners to study the new legal framework thoroughly.

According to Ng: "Many TCM practitioners are not adequately informed about the T&CM Act 2016.

"Even minor compliance violations could lead to severe penalties. TCM organisations need to adapt accordingly as well. TCM organisations need to go beyond simply relaying government



The Health team receiving the Best Healthcare Business Media Award.



(Above) The opening of the ceremony, signalled by the strike of the gong.

(From left to right) Law Beng Chee, Kay Mathy, Ng Po Kok, and Robert Kok.

directives and take a proactive role in advocating for TCM practitioners' rights."

Earlier this year, a proposed service tax on TCM sparked opposition from political parties and Chinese organisations. Their strong advocacy ultimately led the Ministry of Finance to exempt TCM from the service tax.

Ng urged TCM organisations to take a more assertive role in advocating for fundamental policy changes. For instance, they could push for the recognition of TCM sick leave and the inclusion of TCM treatments in health insurance plans.

"Advocating for these changes can help make TCM a more supported part of the mainstream healthcare system," he asserted.



(From left to right) Low Huei Lee, Prof Dr Cheong Juan Hai, Ng Po Kok, and YB Lau Weng San.

In the spotlight

THIS year, the Federation of Chinese Physicians & Acupuncturists Association of Malaysia (FCPAAM) collaborated with The Health, an English-language medical publication.

"This marks the first time an English-language media outlet has worked closely with FCPAAM," said the president of FCPAAM, Prof Dr Ng Po Kok.

While traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is widely covered in Chinese-language media, its presence in English-language media remains limited. This affects its integration into mainstream healthcare, relegating it to a niche or culturally specific practice.

By collaborating with The Health, the federation is positioning TCM within mainstream healthcare discussions. It helps to dispel misconceptions about TCM and broaden its reach and relevance.

In recognition of its role in promoting the health industry, The Health was honoured with 'The Best Healthcare Business Media Award' at the Golden Medical Award 2024.

This win solidifies The Health's reputation as a prominent voice in the industry. In addition, it propels TCM towards broader recognition and acceptance, particularly among those in the health industry who may not yet be aware of its full potential. - **The HEALTH**

Bridging healthcare with tradition

Exploring TCM's evolution for global healthcare solutions

BY ADELINE ANTHONY ALPHONSO

THE 6th World Traditional Medicine Forum and World Federation of TCM Trade Services held in Kuala Lumpur from Nov 15-17, at Berjaya Times Square Hotel, gathered international experts, practitioners and stakeholders in the field of traditional medicine to explore new advancements, share knowledge and discuss the role of traditional practices in global healthcare.

Under the theme "Traditional Medicine: Inheritance & Innovation", this year's forum featured numerous discussions around bridging the gap between traditional healing methods and modern medical advancements.

ADVANCING TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

During the opening ceremony, World Traditional Medicine Forum Chairman Dr Dong Zhilin shared his insights on the growing importance of integrating Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) into contemporary healthcare systems.

He emphasised that the holistic approach of TCM, which focuses on prevention rather than just treatment, offers a promising solution to tackle the rise of non-communicable diseases.

"We must not only preserve our rich heritage but also adapt it to meet today's challenges," he remarked.

Dong's speech also highlighted the need for collaboration between TCM practitioners and modern healthcare providers to create a more inclusive and diverse health system.

He stressed that such integration can bring substantial benefits to both prevention and treatment, particularly in combating chronic diseases like hypertension, diabetes, and heart conditions, which have become global health concerns.

Another distinguished speaker, China Medical Materials Association Executive Vice President and Shandong Hongjitang Pharmaceutical Group Co., Ltd., Chairman Dr Gao Yuankun, also addressed the forum, discussing the growing recognition of TCM's preventive potential.

He noted: "TCM practices such as acupuncture, herbal medicine, and therapeutic massage are not just about curing illnesses but preventing them."

Gao explained that the focus of traditional medicine in preventive care aligns perfectly with global trends toward promoting wellness and early intervention.



Dr Dong Zhilin



Prof Dr Ng Po Kok



Opening ceremony.

He underscored how TCM is evolving beyond being a complementary treatment to becoming a key player in global health strategies, particularly in areas like pain management, stress reduction, and enhancing overall well-being. This is a testament to its growing influence in the healthcare landscape.

The forum was a truly global event, with delegates from China, Holland, Spain, New York, and many other countries all contributing to the rich tapestry of discussions and knowledge

sharing.

It was a resounding success, reinforcing the importance of traditional medicine in contemporary healthcare. It was not only seen as a complement to modern practices but also as a vital component of the global health system.

Moreover, it also offered a vision of a more integrated approach to healthcare - one that embraces the wisdom of traditional practices while utilising modern advancements to improve patient outcomes globally.

Showcasing Chinese medicine's finest

THE inaugural FCPAAM (Federation of Chinese Physicians and Acupuncturists Associations of Malaysia) Cup Awards Ceremony, held as part of the 6th World Traditional Medicine Forum and World Federation of TCM Trade Services, was a night to remember.

Organised by FCPAAM, the ceremony honoured 29 exceptional acupuncturists and tuina (a Chinese therapeutic massage) practitioners for their outstanding contributions to the field of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM).

President of FCPAAM, Prof Dr Ng Po Kok, highlighted the importance of such awards, aiming to elevate the standards of TCM in Malaysia.

He said: "We hope to make the FCPAAM Cup an annual event that not only encourages practitioners to refine their skills but also fosters an environment of mutual learning."

In his address, Ng also reflected on the association's past efforts, noting the success of the 3rd TCM



FCPAAM Cup Awards winners

Golden Award held earlier this year.

"While the Golden Award focuses on TCM's broader impact, the FCPAAM Cup hones in on the skills of acupuncture and tuina," he explained, setting the two awards apart.

Moreover, World Traditional Medicine Forum Chairman Dr Dong Zhilin underscored the global significance of the event, highlighting its role in connecting TCM practitioners from different regions.

"This forum attracts elite practitioners from over 80 countries, providing a vital platform for academic exchange and collaboration."

Dong also emphasised the importance of the annual academic conferences organised as part of the forum.

He added: "These gatherings promote the global develop-

ment of traditional medicine, ensuring its relevance across diverse regions and health systems."

Organising Committee Chairperson Prof Dr Cheong Juan Hai echoed this sentiment, describing the forum as a melting pot of ideas and expertise.

She remarked: "This event allows us to explore innovative solutions to global health challenges while celebrating the unique contributions of traditional medicine."

The awards and forum not only recognised exceptional talent but also set a high standard for the future of TCM.

By encouraging practitioners to hone their craft, events like these strengthen the field and promote its growth both locally and internationally. - **The HEALTH**

Bridging worlds

TCM's journey across borders and cultures

TRADITIONAL Chinese Medicine (TCM), rooted in millennia-old practices, is not just a hallmark of Eastern healing but a growing global phenomenon.

In recent years, its reach has expanded far beyond China, finding footholds in regions as varied as Europe and Latin America. Spain, in particular, has embraced TCM as part of its evolving healthcare landscape, thanks to advocates like Dr Ramón María Calduch.

His efforts to bring ancient Chinese remedies into Western systems highlight a rising global momentum to integrate TCM's holistic philosophies with modern medical frameworks.

The President of the World Federation of Acupuncture Societies in China, President of the European Chamber of Commerce for TCM (ECCTCM) and Vice President of the Forum of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Calduch, whose journey with TCM began in 1988 during a visit to China, has since become a leading advocate for integrating Chinese medicine into Western healthcare.

"After that first visit, I introduced Chinese medicine in Spain," Calduch recounted.

Over the decades, his dedication has extended to prominent roles in global TCM organisations, underscoring his commitment to bridging East and West.

Reflecting on this year's forum, Calduch emphasised its dual focus: showcasing traditional practices and promoting Chinese medicinal products.

He highlighted a significant milestone for TCM - the World Health Organisation's (WHO) adoption of the ICD-11 protocol, which facilitates insurance coverage for traditional treatments.

"Next year, the WHO will approve a new strategy for traditional and integrative medicine," he noted, calling it a critical step toward including TCM in national healthcare systems worldwide.

However, challenges persist, particularly in regions like Europe, where scepticism about traditional medicine often arises from perceived gaps in scientific validation.

Calduch dismissed this as a mis-



Dr Ramón María Calduch



conception, pointing to numerous peer-reviewed studies supporting TCM's efficacy. "It's vital to educate policy-makers about the value of traditional medicine," he stressed.

Advocating for a harmonious blend of Western and traditional approaches, Calduch championed integrative healthcare as the future. He believes that the best outcomes for patients come from combining both systems.

For Calduch, the forum not only celebrated TCM's advancements but also highlighted Malaysia's role as a gracious host, fostering meaningful global connections.

The event even reaffirmed his belief in TCM's transformative potential and the importance of collaboration in promoting this ancient science worldwide.

Healing across cultures

NEW YORK City, a global crossroads of cultures, has become a fertile ground for the integration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). With its vibrant diversity and openness to innovation, the city has embraced acupuncture and herbal remedies, weaving them into its modern healthcare landscape.

Leading this charge is Dr Yemeng Chen, President of the New York College of Traditional Chinese Medicine. His work reflects the city's spirit - melding ancient traditions with cutting-edge advancements to create a harmonious approach to healing.

Yemeng outlined the steady progress of TCM in the United States, with acupuncture leading the way.

He shared: "It has been over 50 years since acupuncture developed as a profession here.

"In New York, laws enacted decades ago paved the way for licensed practitioners to incorporate Chinese herbal medicine into their services.

"Today, 47 States, plus Washington, D.C., have established systems for TCM licensing,



Dr Yemeng Chen

with a rigorous education and national board examination process ensuring professional standards."

However, challenges persist.

Insurance accessibility remains a significant hurdle, particularly in federal programs for seniors. While there have been advances, such as Medicare (a health insurance program for people age 65 or older and younger people with disabilities) offering partial coverage for acupuncture in treating low back pain, Yemeng emphasised the ongoing need for advocacy to expand TCM's reach.

"We are continuously working to increase privileges and accessibility for the benefit of our patients," he said.

Attending the 6th World Traditional Medicine Forum and the World Federation of TCM Trade Services in Malaysia, Yemeng saw the event as an opportunity to exchange clinical insights and research findings with global experts.

"Forums like this are essential for the advancement of TCM," he noted, praising the platform for fostering collaboration and innovation.

As TCM continues to gain recognition worldwide, Yemeng envisions a future where traditional and modern medicine work hand in hand.

In New York and beyond, this ancient practice is charting a course toward a healthier, more inclusive global community.

Forum insights

AT the 6th World Traditional Medicine Forum and World Federation of TCM Trade Services, Bangsar Heights Group of Companies President and Chief Executive Officer Dr Robert A N Lim, a first-time attendee, shared his impressions of the event, emphasising how Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has become an integral part of Malaysia's healthcare system.

A key figure in Malaysia's construction and real estate sectors, with a few decades of profitable real estate experience, he noted: "TCM plays a vital role, complementing Western medicine, with institutions like Tung Shin Hospital offering both.

"The increasing acceptance of TCM among various ethnic groups in Malaysia shows its deep-rooted presence in society too."

Lim also discussed the evolving nature of the forum, believing that the exchange of clinical knowledge and research at such events enhances the profession and acknowledged challenges for TCM practitioners, particularly the emphasis on long-term healing versus immediate cures.

However, he remains optimistic about TCM's future, asserting that it will continue to play a crucial role in global healthcare. - **The HEALTH**

Cutting-edge technology

UPM Teaching Hospital leads prostate cancer innovation with groundbreaking TMA

UNIVERSITI Putra Malaysia's (UPM) teaching hospital, Hospital Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah (HSAAS), has marked a significant milestone by successfully conducting its first targeted microwave ablation (TMA) procedure for early-stage prostate cancer.

This breakthrough makes UPM the first institution in Malaysia and Southeast Asia to offer this cutting-edge treatment, providing new hope for patients seeking minimally invasive alternatives to traditional therapies such as surgery and radiotherapy.

A GROWING CONCERN

Prostate cancer is the second most common cancer affecting men globally and ranks third in prevalence among Malaysian men. Prof Dato' Dr Khairul Asri, Head of Urology at UPM, emphasised the importance of early detection, which can be achieved through a simple Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) blood test.

Diagnostic accuracy can be further improved using MRI imaging and targeted biopsies. However, in Malaysia, 50 to 60 per cent of men are diagnosed with prostate cancer at an advanced stage, where treatment options are more limited, and outcomes are less favourable.

Prof Khairul stressed the need for men, particularly those over 50 or younger individuals with a family history of prostate or breast cancer, to discuss PSA testing with their healthcare providers.

Early-stage prostate cancer often presents no symptoms, making screening critical. In contrast, symptoms such as frequent urination, blood in the urine, dribbling, and back or bone pain are more commonly associated with advanced stages of the disease.

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

Since the establishment of the Putra Prostate Centre in 2020, HSAAS has positioned itself as a one-stop centre for prostate cancer care in collaboration with the National Cancer Institute in Putrajaya.

The hospital has been at the forefront of innovative treatments, offering pioneering techniques such as MRI-US fusion prostate biopsy, transperineal prostate biopsy under local anaes-



The TMA device, which is mobile and easy to carry, consists of a microwave generator attached to the Koelis Trinity device, which is used for prostate mapping and targeted intervention, like a GPS.

Dr Vincent Khor performing targeted microwave ablation therapy for a patient with localised prostate cancer.

thesia, REZUM water vapour therapy for benign prostate enlargement, and high-intensity focused ultrasound (HIFU) focal therapy.

Moreover, HSAAS is one of the few public hospitals in Malaysia equipped to offer robotic surgery for prostate cancer, significantly enhancing precision and recovery outcomes.

Through its collaboration with the National Cancer Institute, the hospital ensures patients have access to comprehensive care, including radiotherapy and advanced diagnostic imaging using PSMA (prostate-specific membrane antigen) PET/CT scans.

FOCAL THERAPY

Traditional treatments for prostate cancer, such as surgery and radiation, often come with significant side effects, including incontinence and erectile dysfunction.

To address this, HSAAS has introduced focal therapy, a less invasive option for early-stage prostate cancer that offers improved quality of life for patients post-treatment. In September 2023, the hospital launched this service using HIFU technology to provide more precise and less disruptive treatment.

One patient who underwent the HIFU procedure at HSAAS shared his experience: "I was diagnosed with prostate cancer a few months ago, and the news was quite overwhelming because I am still young, and I am not willing to live my life with incontinence and erectile dysfunction.

"When I learned about the HIFU treatment option, I was relieved to know that there was a less invasive choice available. I recovered fast and experienced minimal discomfort after that. I am hopeful that this treatment will lead to a cancer-free future without debilitating side effects that often accompany conventional treatments."

INTRODUCING TMA

TMA is the latest addition to the range

of focal therapies available at HSAAS, offering a promising new option for patients diagnosed with early-stage prostate cancer.

This procedure involves precise needle ablations using microwave energy, guided by advanced MRI-US software fusion technology with an organ-based tracking mechanism. Clinical studies in France and Hong Kong have shown impressive results, with a cancer cure rate of up to 90 per cent and excellent safety profiles.

Prof Dr Hamidon Basri, the hospital's director, shared: "We are proud to be the first hospital in Malaysia and Southeast Asia to offer this advanced treatment.

"Our goal is to provide patients with the most effective and least invasive treatment options, and this procedure is a testament to our commitment to that mission."

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

The introduction of TMA at HSAAS is part of a Phase II clinical trial, a collaborative effort with the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK).

Prof Dr Intan Hakimah, Deputy Dean (Academic) from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at UPM, highlighted the importance of international partnerships in advancing medical research.

"UPM is dedicated to advancing medical research, particularly in the field of cancer treatment, through collaborations and cutting-edge technologies. This partnership with CUHK exemplifies our commitment to fostering international collaborations that drive forward-thinking solutions in healthcare and medical science."

Dr Vincent Khor, the lead investigator on the TMA project, expressed his enthusiasm: "This procedure is a game-changer for prostate cancer treatment. It combines the precision of advanced imaging technology with the effectiveness of microwave energy, making it a promising option for patients diagnosed with stage 1-2 prostate cancer."

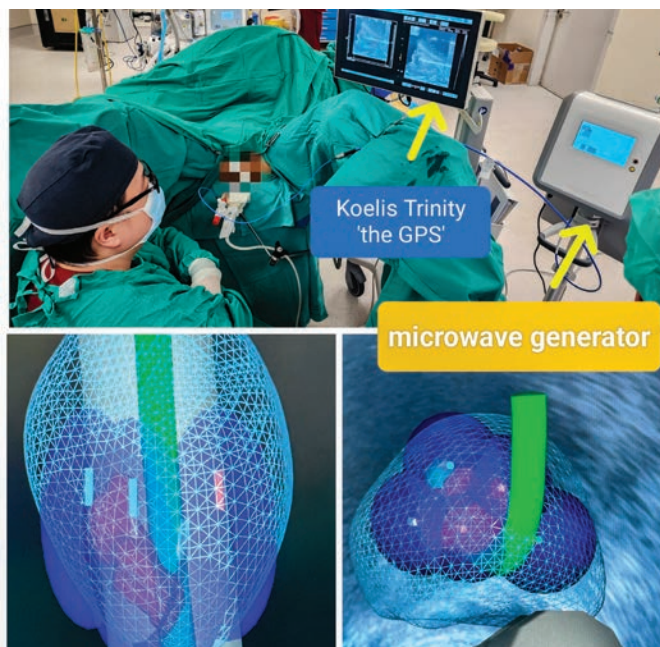
According to Dr Khor, patients who undergo TMA can expect shorter hospital stays, less postoperative pain, and a lower risk of complications compared to traditional surgical methods.

PROMOTING AWARENESS

The urology team at HSAAS encourages men to engage in conversations about prostate cancer screening with their healthcare providers, underscoring the importance of early detection for successful treatment outcomes.

While conventional treatment methods remain essential, the availability of focal therapies like TMA and HIFU at HSAAS represents a new era of precision medicine that prioritises patient well-being and quality of life.

- The HEALTH



A crisis looming

The urgent need for global awareness and action

BY ZAFIRAH ZAFRUDDIN

ANTIMICROBIAL Resistance (AMR) is a global health crisis. This phenomenon threatens not only human health but also animal well-being, agriculture and the global economy. Despite its alarming implications, public awareness of AMR remains low.

To address this issue, the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH) organised a media engagement session workshop at The Everly, Putrajaya.

The workshop, held in conjunction with the World AMR Awareness Week (WAAW), sought to encourage greater media coverage and in-depth reporting on AMR. Representatives from various media outlets attended it.

ANTIBIOTICS USAGE

Tengku Ampuan Rahimah Hospital Consultant Infectious Diseases, Dr Azureen Azmel sheds light on the common misconception surrounding the usage of antibiotics.

“Many people mistakenly believe that viruses and bacteria are the same. It’s crucial to understand that they are fundamentally different.”

This misapprehension often leads to unnecessary antibiotic prescriptions. In some cases, patients continue to insist on antibiotics despite being advised that they are not needed.

“Antibiotics target bacterial infections, not viral infections,” she reiterated.

Dr Azureen stressed the importance of using antibiotics astutely. Misusing them can precipitate antimicrobial resistance, making common infections harder to treat.

In fact, a 2019 National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) revealed a significant gap in public awareness about antibiotics and AMR. The survey, which included over 3,000 respondents, primarily middle-aged individuals from rural areas, showed that 78 per cent had never heard of AMR.

Additionally, two-thirds of respondents incorrectly believed that antibiotics could kill viruses.

MEDIA’S ROLE

The media plays a crucial role in raising public awareness of AMR. While campaigns like WAAW can help spotlight the issue, ongoing dialogue is needed to ensure AMR remains a central focus in public discourse.

The clarity and consistency of Covid-19 messaging can serve as a blueprint for

AMR campaigns. By adopting similar strategies, we can gradually improve public understanding of AMR.

During an interactive panel session titled ‘Overcoming Challenges in AMR Reporting,’ the Vital Signs Asia Co-Founder and Director and The Vibes Former Executive Director, Manvir Victor, proposed addressing AMR through targeted community outreach.

He referenced Mongolia’s approach to addressing vitamin deficiencies among children: “Mongolia is a big country, making it challenging for aid to reach the population. To address this, they deployed mobile health units to villages. With the village chief’s help, they reached out to the women, who were the primary caretakers of their community.

“They educated the women about the importance of vitamins and placed the supplements in their care to ensure their families received them.”

Within just five years, the initiative successfully addressed vitamin deficiency in the affected regions. This success story underscores the significance of community-based health interventions.

Recognising women as the primary caregivers, Victor believes they are the ideal audience for health-related awareness campaigns. This approach not only ensures broader acceptance but also drives behavioural change within families.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

In 2019, AMR caused 1.27 million deaths worldwide, exceeding the fatalities



Dr Azureen Azmel

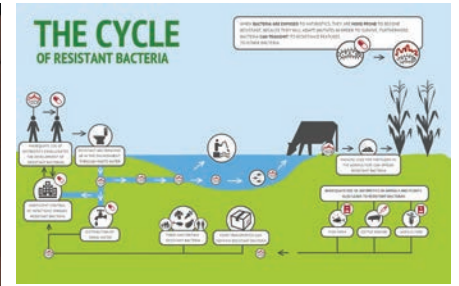


IMAGE BY MYOHAR

caused by human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and malaria. By 2050, projections estimate AMR could result in 10 million deaths annually, with 4.7 million occurring in Asia alone.

Without immediate action, Malaysia could face not just 87,000 deaths but also an economic loss of US\$2.5 billion due to AMR. The World Bank has also cautioned that failing to control AMR could lead to US\$3.4 trillion in global economic losses by 2030.

AMR drives up healthcare costs through additional medical interventions, extended hospitalisations, and reinfection risks.

Tourism-dependent sectors in countries with high AMR rates may experience a significant revenue loss. In response, governments might be forced to reallocate funds from other development priorities to tackle AMR-related issues. - **The HEALTH**

Interactive panel session.



One Health approach

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) affects not just human health but also animal welfare and ecosystems. One Health is a collaborative approach focused on achieving optimal health outcomes by recognising the interconnectedness of humans, animals, plants, and the environment.

Malaysia has been embracing the One Health approach to combat AMR. One of its initiatives is the Tricycle Project, undertaken in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO).

This project involves collecting samples from various sources. These

samples help researchers with analysing the spread and emergence of AMR across different sectors:

1. Human Health: Samples from patients in hospitals.
2. Animal Health: Samples from chicken faeces, representing the food chain.
3. Environmental Health: Samples from water sources.

Since 2017, Malaysia has implemented the Malaysian Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (MyAP-AMR). At present, the plan is in its 2022-2026 phase, targeting several critical areas.

- Raising Awareness:

Conducting education campaigns to inform the public about the dangers of AMR and the importance of antibiotic stewardship.

- Surveillance: Improving data collection systems to monitor AMR developments and identify emerging threats.
- Infection Control: Promoting good hygiene practices and infection prevention measures in healthcare settings.
- Responsible Antibiotic Use: Ensuring that antibiotics are prescribed and used appropriately.

Deep dive

Understanding the different frequencies of the brain



BRAIN NOTES

BY TONY PEREIRA

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THE human brain is an extraordinary organ, constantly at work to control every thought, action, and emotion. One of the key ways it operates is through electrical impulses known as brainwaves.

These brainwaves represent the synchronised electrical activity of neurons, and they can be measured using an electroencephalogram (EEG). Brainwaves exist at different frequencies, each corresponding to varying states of consciousness and mental function.

These frequencies are typically divided into five categories: Delta, Theta, Alpha, Beta, and Gamma waves. Each of these frequencies plays a vital role in shaping our cognitive abilities, emotional responses, and even physical health.

DELTA WAVES (0.5-4 HZ)

Delta waves are the slowest of all brainwave frequencies, ranging from 0.5 to 4 Hz. These brainwaves are typically associated with the deepest stages of sleep, such as non-REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep.

This slow frequency allows the brain and body to enter a state of profound relaxation and regeneration. During this time, the body undergoes physical repair, cell regeneration, and the production of vital hormones such as growth hormone.

Delta waves are essential for restorative sleep, which is crucial for overall health and well-being. A deficiency in delta wave activity can result in poor sleep quality, leaving individuals feeling tired, irritable, and prone to illness.

Research also suggests that delta waves are involved in unconscious bodily functions, such as heartbeat regulation and digestion, as well as in the recovery process after illness or injury.

Role of Delta Waves:

- Deep sleep and healing
- Unconscious bodily processes
- Physical regeneration and hormone production

Disruptions to delta wave activity, such as sleep disorders or prolonged stress, can have significant impacts on health. The benefits of delta waves extend beyond just sleep; they may also contribute to deep states of meditation and relaxation.

THETA WAVES (4-8 HZ)

Theta waves are a step up in frequency from delta waves, ranging between 4 and 8 Hz. They are most often associ-

ated with light sleep, dreams, and deep meditation.

Theta wave activity is robust during REM sleep, the stage in which vivid dreaming occurs. However, theta waves are not exclusive to sleep; they are also linked to creativity, intuition, and spiritual experiences.

During theta wave states, the brain is highly receptive to new information, making it a fertile period for learning, memory consolidation, and emotional processing.

Many people report experiencing bursts of creativity and insight during these states, which is why theta waves are often associated with heightened intuition and problem-solving.

Theta waves can also be induced through meditation, hypnosis, or relaxation exercises, allowing individuals to tap into a more reflective and introspective mindset.

I recall one instance when I went to bed with a particular work problem in my mind that I was trying to solve. Even though I felt I was in deep sleep (alpha state), I must have been in the theta state because, at some point, I woke up suddenly with the answer to the problem I was trying to solve.

Those were the days when we did not have broadband. So, at around three in the morning, I drove to the office and sent an email with the solution to the head office!

Role of Theta Waves:

- Light sleep and REM dreams
- Creativity and intuition
- Emotional healing and memory processing

Interestingly, children tend to have higher levels of theta activity than adults, which might explain their ability to absorb information rapidly and their vivid imagination.

Adults can also enhance their theta wave activity through mindfulness practices, which can improve creativity, emotional health, and even

“Research also suggests that delta waves are involved in unconscious bodily functions, such as heartbeat regulation and digestion, as well as in the recovery process after illness or injury.”

cognitive function.

ALPHA WAVES (8-12 HZ)

Alpha waves are considered the “bridge” between the conscious and subconscious mind. These brainwaves occur at frequencies between 8 and 12 Hz and are typically associated with states of calm, relaxation, and increased focus.

Alpha wave activity is most prevalent when we are awake but in a relaxed state, such as during meditation or when quietly reflecting. It is also present when we close our eyes or engage in light daydreaming.

Alpha waves play a crucial role in stress reduction and mental coordination. When alpha waves are dominant, the brain is in a state of relaxed alertness, making it easier to access more profound levels of creativity and problem-solving while staying calm and focused.

This state is often referred to as being “in the zone” or achieving “flow” in sports or other high-performance activities.

Role of Alpha Waves:

- Relaxed alertness and focus
- Stress relief and mental clarity
- Access to subconscious thought and creativity

Research suggests that practices such as yoga, deep breathing, and mindfulness meditation can enhance alpha wave activity, which in turn can lead to reduced anxiety, improved mental clarity, and increased emotional resilience.

Individuals with anxiety disorders or chronic stress may have lower levels of alpha wave activity, making it harder for them to relax.

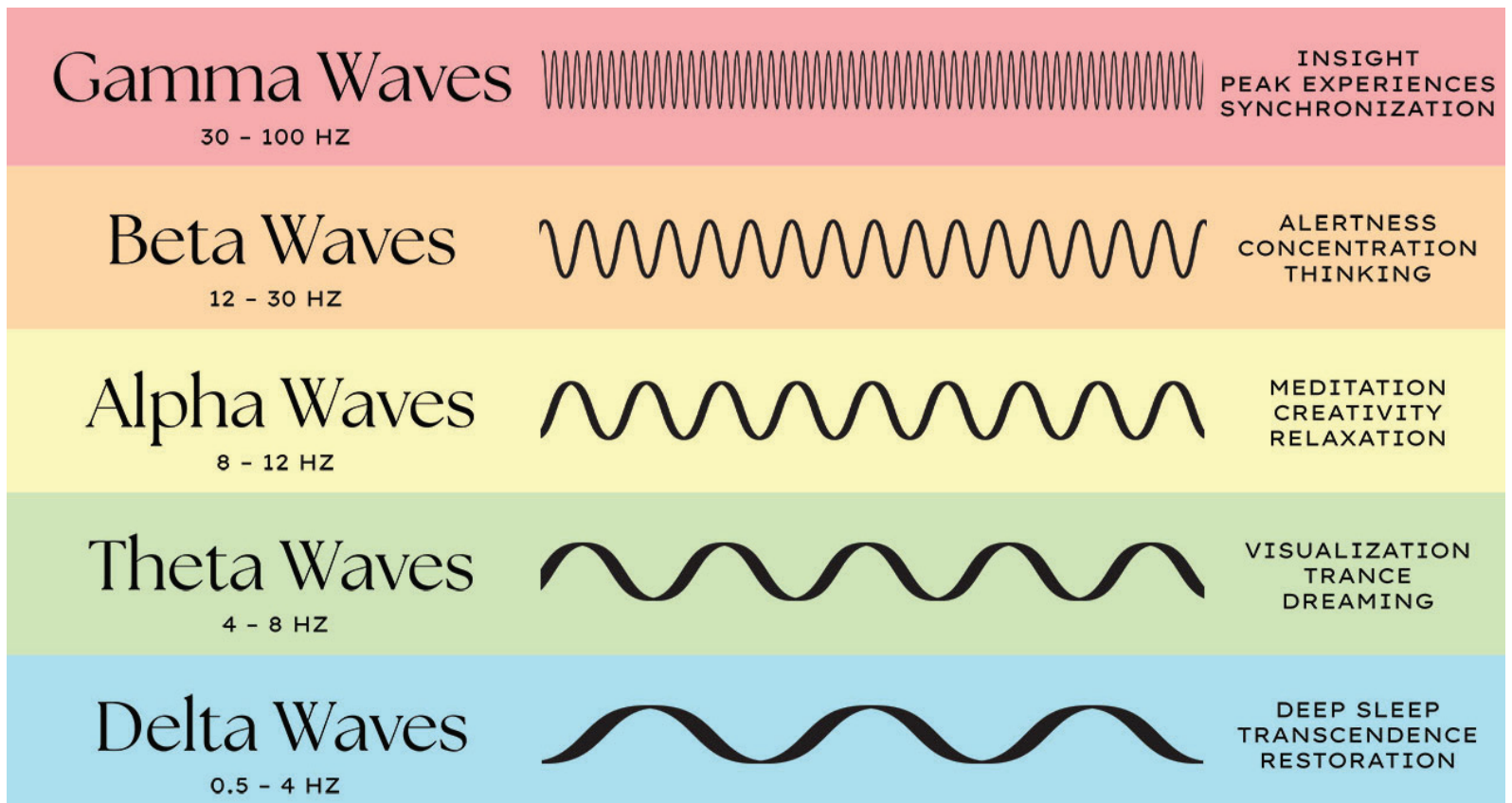
BETA WAVES (12-30 HZ)

Beta waves are the brainwaves most commonly associated with active thinking, problem-solving, and focus.

Operating at frequencies between 12 and 30 Hz, beta waves are dominant when we are fully alert, engaged in conversation, or performing analytical tasks. They represent the brain’s ability to process information quickly and efficiently.

While beta waves are essential for daily functioning and productivity, too much beta activity can lead to stress, anxiety, and restlessness. Excessive beta wave production is often observed in individuals who are overly anxious or hyperactive, as their minds are constantly racing.

On the other hand, a lack of beta activity can result in cognitive slug-



gishness, difficulty concentrating, or even depressive states.

Role of Beta Waves:

- Active thought and focus
- Decision-making and problem-solving
- Increased energy and cognitive engagement

Because beta waves are associated with alertness and concentration, they can be enhanced through cognitive training exercises, mental challenges, or even caffeine intake. However, maintaining a balance between beta activity and other brainwave frequencies is vital to avoid the adverse effects of chronic stress and mental overload.

GAMMA WAVES (30-100 HZ)

Gamma waves represent the highest frequency of brainwaves, ranging from 30 to 100 Hz. These waves are associated with heightened states of perception, learning, and cognitive functioning.

Gamma waves are believed to be responsible for the brain's ability to integrate and process information across different areas, leading to moments of insight, mental clarity, and heightened awareness.

Gamma waves are often associated with peak cognitive performance and are particularly strong during activities that require high-level problem-solving or complex mental tasks.

Individuals with high levels of gamma activity often demonstrate enhanced memory recall, attention, and the ability to connect seemingly unrelated ideas. Some research also suggests a link between gamma wave activity and higher states of consciousness, including deep meditative states and spiritual experiences.

Role of Gamma Waves:

- High-level cognitive processing
- Insight, learning, and memory recall
- Integration of information across brain regions

Recent studies have shown that gamma wave activity may also be involved in regulating mood and emotional responses. People who practice regular meditation, particularly techniques focused on compassion and mindfulness, tend to exhibit higher levels of gamma wave activity.

This may be why these practices are often linked to increased feelings of well-being and emotional resilience.

BALANCING BRAINWAVE ACTIVITY

Understanding the different frequencies of brainwaves is essential because they offer insight into how the brain functions in various states of consciousness.

Each brainwave frequency serves a unique purpose, and maintaining a balance between them is essential for mental and physical health. For example, too much beta activity can result in stress and anxiety, while an overabundance of delta waves may lead to sluggishness and depression.

There are various techniques to help regulate brainwave activity, such as meditation, neurofeedback, and cognitive training. Meditation, in particular, has been shown to promote alpha and theta wave activity, which can reduce stress and enhance creativity.

Neurofeedback, a form of biofeedback, allows individuals to monitor their brainwave activity and make adjustments to improve focus, relaxation, or mood.

There are various instruments available online that claim to help measure which brain state our brain is in at a particular point in time. These instruments are also supposed to help train the brain to get to a specific brain state. How accurate these are is difficult to comment on.

Cognitive training exercises, such as puzzles, memory games, and problem-solving tasks, can increase beta and gamma wave activity, helping to improve focus, attention, and cognitive performance.

Physical exercise, especially aerobic activity, has also been linked to increased gamma wave activity, which can lead to improved mood and mental sharpness.

CONCLUSION

Brainwaves are a fundamental aspect of how our brains function, influencing everything from sleep and relaxation to high-level cognitive processes and emotional regulation.

By understanding the different frequencies of brainwaves - delta, theta, alpha, beta, and gamma - we can gain valuable insights into our mental states and learn how to harness the power of these waves for improved health and well-being.

Achieving a balance between these different frequencies is critical to optimizing mental and physical performance, reducing stress, and enhancing overall quality of life.

With the right tools and practices, it's possible to train our brains to achieve this balance, leading to better sleep, greater creativity, improved cognitive performance, and emotional resilience. - **The HEALTH**

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Critical illness: Does halalness matter?

Islam provides clear guidance on permissible and prohibited matters during illness, ensuring actions align with faith



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In general, critical illness refers to any serious health condition that poses an immediate threat to life, requires intensive medical attention, and often involves organ dysfunction or failure.

Such illnesses typically necessitate treatment in a specialised intensive care unit (ICU) where close monitoring, advanced life-supporting therapies, and interventions are available to stabilise the patient and address severe complications.

According to Nickson (2020), advances in intensive care have led to a growing cohort of chronic critical illness patients who would have otherwise succumbed to acute illness survive in a state dependent on prolonged intensive care therapies. This situation may cause a heavy burden of costs to the individual, family and society; it requires extreme use of resources and causes considerable distress to the patient and family.

In Islam, critical illness is seen as a test of faith and a way to draw closer to Allah the Almighty, offering opportunities for patience, forgiveness, and purification from sins. Islam provides clear guidance on permissible and prohibited matters during illness, ensuring actions align with faith, such as allowing necessary (al-dharurah) medical treatments while prohibiting any practices that contradict Islamic beliefs.

Muslims are encouraged to seek medical treatment, make prayers, and rely on Allah's will, believing that all things, including illness, are part of His divine plan. Supporting and comforting the sick is also highly valued, as it strengthens empathy and community bonds. Through these actions, illness becomes a path for spiritual growth and acceptance of Allah's wisdom.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A CRITICAL ILLNESS

Common types of critical illnesses include cardiovascular emergencies such as heart attacks and life-threatening arrhythmias; respiratory conditions such as Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) or severe pneumonia leading to respiratory failure; neurological crises such as large stroke or severe seizure, severe infections and sepsis such as septic shock; and traumatic injuries such as significant injuries from accidents or fall often involving multiple body system.

Three possible outcomes could occur following an acute illness, namely recovery (complete or incomplete), death during the acute illness or progression

to persistent or chronic critical illness (Nickson, 2020). The key characteristics of critical illness may include:

- **Life-threatening nature:** Critical illnesses are conditions that, if untreated, have a high risk of death or significant health deterioration. Examples include heart attacks, severe strokes, respiratory failure, and sepsis.
- **Organ dysfunction or failure:** These illnesses often involve one or more vital organs, such as the heart, lungs, liver, or kidneys, being impaired or failing, which requires specialised care to support organ function temporarily or permanently.
- **Need for intensive treatment:** Management of critical illnesses frequently involves advanced medical interventions like mechanical ventilation, dialysis, blood transfusions, and high-dose medications to stabilise the patient.
- **Prolonged recovery and rehabilitation:** Survivors of critical illness may require extensive rehabilitation and follow-up care due to physical and psychological impacts from both the disease and the intensive treatments involved.

Critical illness management is often a collaborative, multidisciplinary effort involving physicians, nurses, pharmacists, physical therapists, and other specialists working to stabilise the patient and initiate recovery as swiftly and safely as possible.

DELICATE BALANCE

The concept of "halalness" in critical illness concerns the permissibility and ethical considerations of medical interventions under Islamic law (shari'ah). It involves exploring how Muslims can receive healthcare aligned with their religious values, especially in critical, life-threatening situations. It is about maintaining the delicate balance between preserving life, respecting religious beliefs, and understanding medical limitations.

For Muslims, the concept of halal extends beyond dietary restrictions, encompassing all aspects of life, including medical treatment to preserve life (Hifz al-nafs). 'Halal' comes from the root word hala-yahillu-hillan wa halalan, which means "permissible" in Arabic, and signifies actions that align with the teachings of Islam as outlined in the Quran and the Hadith (sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad SAW).

In medicine, this relates to ensuring that healthcare practices respect Islamic

law, especially in critical illnesses, where complex decisions around treatments, end-of-life care, and life-sustaining measures are often involved.

MANAGEMENT OF CRITICAL ILLNESSES

When addressing critical illness and halal issues in Islam, it is important to base decisions on relevant Quranic verses and Hadith. These sources offer guidance on life preservation, the importance of intention, and the permissibility of using non-Halal means in cases of necessity.

1. Necessity (al-dharurah): Islam allows exceptions in cases of extreme necessity, especially when it comes to preserving life (Hifz al-Nafs). The principle of dharurah is derived from the Quran, which states:

"He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah. But whoever is forced by necessity, neither desiring it nor transgressing its limit—there is no sin upon him. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."
(Quran, Al-Baqarah, 2:173).

This verse highlights the permissibility of consuming otherwise forbidden substances (such as non-halal food or medicine) if it is necessary to save one's life, as long as the person does not seek it out or enjoy it unnecessarily.

2. Preservation of life (Hifz al-nafs): The preservation of human life is one of the five essential objectives of Islamic law (Maqasid al-Shari'ah). The Quran emphasises the sanctity of life and the importance of saving it:

"...whoever saves a life, it will be as if they saved all of humanity..." (Quran, Al-Maidah, 5:32)

This verse underscores the immense value Islam places on saving lives, which forms the basis for allowing life-saving treatments, even if they involve non-halal substances or methods when no alternatives are available.

3. End-of-life decisions: End-of-life care is a sensitive area in the discussion of halalness in healthcare. Islamic teachings emphasise husn al-khatimah (a good ending) and the dignity of the dying process. However, critical illness often leads to difficult decisions about withdrawing life support, pain management, and managing end-of-life symptoms.

While Islam encourages seeking medical treatment, it does not support futile care, where interventions extend suffering without improving the quality of life (Chamsi-Pasha and Albar, 2017). Islamic ethics often endorse the provi-

sion of palliative care when the chances of recovery are negligible, allowing patients to die naturally rather than prolonging life artificially. Scholars agree on the permissibility of adequate pain relief, even if it may indirectly hasten death, as long as the intent is to relieve suffering, not to cause death directly.

"There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment."
(Sahih al-Bukhari, 582)

This Hadith encourages seeking medical treatment while acknowledging that ultimate healing comes from Allah the Almighty. In end-of-life situations, if medical experts conclude that treatment is futile, the family may decide to withhold further interventions.

"None of you should wish for death because of a calamity befalling him; but if he has to wish for death, he should say: 'O Allah! Keep me alive as long as life is better for me and let me die if death is better for me.'" (Sahih al-Bukhari, 5671)

This Hadith emphasises patience during suffering and discourages asking for death, while also recognising that death may sometimes be a form of relief in cases of irreversible suffering.

Use of non-halal medication: When critically ill patients need non-halal medications due to the lack of alternatives, the principle of necessity permits their use. Scholars cite the Hadith that allows for necessary exceptions:

"The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Allah has sent down the disease and the cure and has made for every disease a cure. So, seek treatment, but do not seek treatment with what is unlawful.'" (Sunan Abu Dawood, 3874)

This Hadith suggests that Muslims should seek treatment, but it is generally encouraged to use lawful (halal) treatments. However, based on the principle of necessity (al-dharurah), if no halal options are available and withholding treatment would harm the patient, using non-halal medicine is allowed.

Caring for the sick and the importance of intention: Islam places great value on caring for the sick, with numerous Hadiths emphasising the reward for visiting and supporting the ill. Intention (al-niyyah) plays a crucial role in medical decisions, as actions taken with a sincere intention to seek treatment and preserve life are highly valued.

"He who relieves the hardship of a believer in this world, Allah will relieve his hardship on the Day of Judgment." (Sahih Muslim)

This Hadith speaks to the reward for alleviating suffering, which can be extended to the context of providing care and treatment for critically ill patients.

Pain management and palliative care: Islam encourages the relief of suffering, and the use of medication to manage pain, even if it may lead to sedation or reduced consciousness, is generally permitted when the intention is to ease suffering rather than hasten death.

"There comes forth from their bellies a drink

of varying colours wherein is healing for men. Verily, in this is a sign for people who reflect." (Quran, An-Nahl, 16:69)

This verse is often interpreted to encourage seeking treatment and healing, whether through natural means or medicine.

FAMILY AND RELIGIOUS COUNSEL

Family members play a significant role in decision-making processes for Muslim patients, especially in critical conditions where patients may be hindered. The concept of al-Shura (consultation) is vital in Islam, where family members, religious leaders, and healthcare providers collaborate to make decisions that respect and benefit (al-maslahah) the patient's values and beliefs.

For Muslims, having access to religious counsel during critical illness can bring comfort and reassurance, providing moral guidance in making difficult choices. Religious figures familiar with Islamic ethics can be instrumental in bridging the gap between medical realities and religious teachings, especially for families struggling to understand complex medical options.

AWARENESS AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Healthcare providers need to understand the significance of halalness in critical illness to ensure culturally sensitive and religiously compliant care. Misunderstandings can lead to mistrust, potentially affecting treatment adherence or family cooperation. Providers should aim to understand the basic principles of Islamic bioethics and the current fatwa, especially when working in diverse settings.

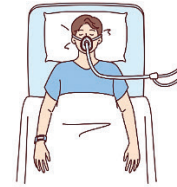
Integrating halal practices into healthcare may include efforts like offering halal-certified pharmaceuticals, accommodating religious practices, and consulting with Islamic scholars on complex bioethical questions. Many hospitals now employ cultural competence training for healthcare providers, which often includes education on Islamic practices, to ensure a holistic approach to Muslim patients' care.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Islam provides a framework for dealing with critical illness through a balance of preserving life, seeking permissible treatments, and using exceptions in cases of necessity. Quranic verses and Hadith support the idea of compassion, intention, and the ultimate sovereignty of Allah the Almighty in matters of life and death.

Halalness in critical illness is a multifaceted concept shaped by religious teachings, ethical considerations, and medical needs. It emphasises preserving life and dignity while respecting religious boundaries and personal beliefs. Understanding halalness in critical care

WHAT DOES ISLAM SAY ABOUT MANAGEMENT OF CRITICAL ILLNESS?



01

Principle of Necessity (Al-Dharurah)

In extreme necessity cases, Islam permits otherwise forbidden actions to save lives.

Sanctity of Life (Hifz al-Nafs)

Preserving life is one of the objectives of Islamic law

02



03

End-of-Life Care

Islam supports natural death over futile medical interventions.



Use of Non-Halal Medication

Non-halal treatments are allowed if no halal options exist and life is at risk.

04



05

Caring for the Sick

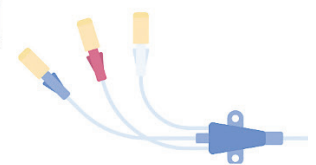
High value is placed on supporting the ill; intention matters.



Pain Management & Palliative Care

Islam encourages relieving suffering. Pain relief is permitted, even if it may reduce consciousness, as long as it is not intended to hasten death.

06



HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS' AWARENESS AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY IS THE KEY

Healthcare providers should understand halal practices and Islamic bioethics to deliver culturally sensitive care, which fosters trust and improves treatment adherence among Muslim patients.

contexts requires a balance between the principles of Islamic bioethics and current fatwa, medical necessity, and compassionate care.

As healthcare becomes increasingly globalised, accommodating the halal needs of patients not only ensures compliance with religious beliefs but also enhances the quality of care by respecting the diverse cultural and religious landscape of modern healthcare. - **The HEALTH**

L-Dopa, what?

New molecule steals spotlight in Parkinson's battle



BRAIN BITES

BY DR WAEL MY MOHAMED

Dr Wael MY Mohamed is with the Department of Basic Medical Science, Kulliyah of Medicine, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).

RECENT research has shown that ophthalmic acid, a cerebral chemical, functions as a neurotransmitter to modulate motor activity, akin to dopamine.

In Parkinson's mice models, this chemical enhanced mobility for nearly 20 hours - significantly beyond the duration of the current medication, L-Dopa.

A novel chemical has shown encouraging outcomes in the treatment of Parkinson's disease, exceeding the efficacy of the commonly used L-Dopa.

This advancement provides optimism for the treatment of motor symptoms and may perhaps mitigate the adverse effects associated with the prolonged use of L-Dopa.

Researchers are enthusiastic about the potential for more efficacious treatments that might decelerate disease development or possibly reverse some facets of Parkinson's disease.

This discovery challenges the long-standing notion that dopamine is the only contributor to motor control.

Researchers are now investigating the use of ophthalmic acid as a prospective therapy for movement disorders, providing optimism for enhanced therapeutic options.

A study team from the University of California, Irvine, has discovered that ophthalmic acid, a molecule in the brain, functions unexpectedly as a neurotransmitter akin to dopamine

in the regulation of motor function, presenting a novel treatment target for Parkinson's disease and other movement disorders.

In the study published in the October edition of the journal *Brain*, researchers found that ophthalmic acid binds to and activates calcium-sensing receptors in the brain, correcting movement deficits in Parkinson's animal models for almost 20 hours.

The debilitating neurodegenerative

“The debilitating neurodegenerative illness impacts millions of individuals globally over the age of 50. Symptoms, including tremors, shaking, and reduced mobility, result from diminishing dopamine levels in the brain due to neuronal degeneration.”

illness impacts millions of individuals globally over the age of 50. Symptoms, including tremors, shaking, and reduced mobility, result from diminishing dopamine levels in the brain due to neuronal degeneration.

L-Dopa, the primary medication for therapy, works by substituting the depleted dopamine and has a duration of two to three hours.

Although initially effective, the efficacy of L-Dopa diminishes with time, and prolonged use results in dyskinesia - uncontrollable, irregular muscle movements in the patient's face, arms, legs, and torso.

These results represent a significant breakthrough that potentially redefines neuroscience by contesting the over-60-year-old perspective that dopamine is the only neurotransmitter governing motor function regulation.

Ophthalmic acid not only facilitated mobility but also significantly exceeded L-dopa in maintaining beneficial effects.

The discovery of the ocular acid-calcium-sensing receptor pathway, an unrecognised system, presents intriguing opportunities for study and therapeutic treatments in movement disorders, particularly for individuals with Parkinson's disease.

This research included extensive metabolic analyses of several brain chemicals to determine those linked to motor function in the absence of dopamine.

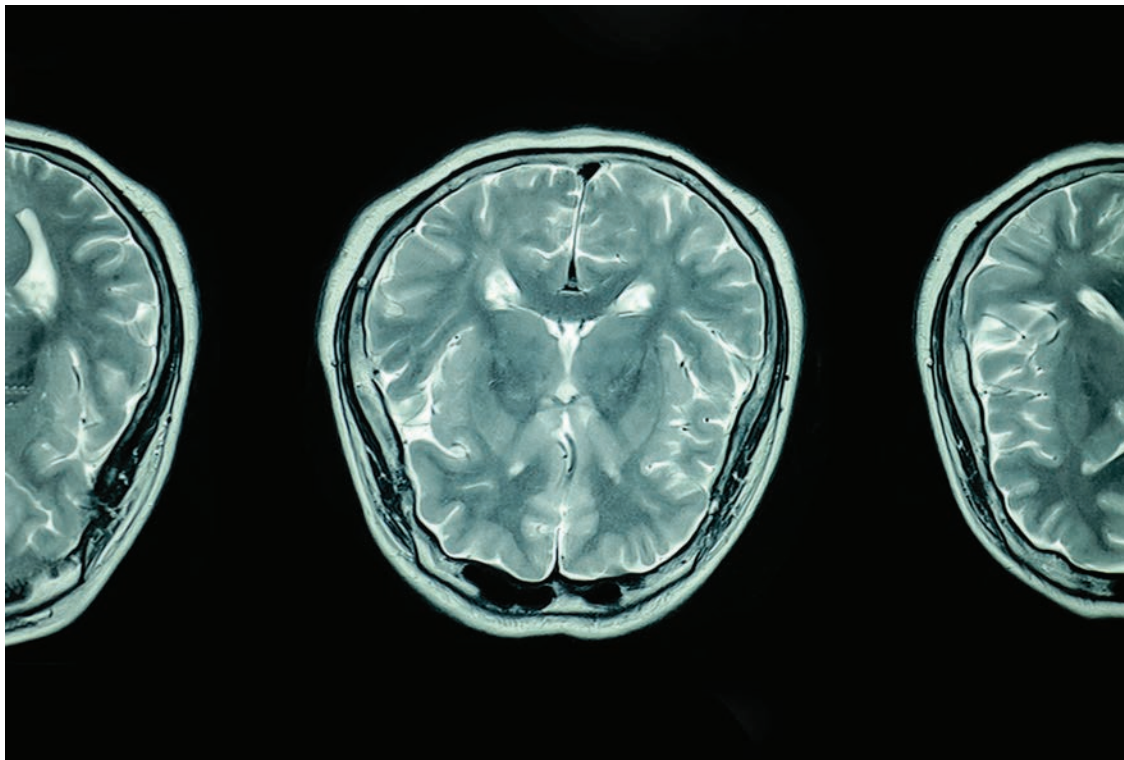
Following comprehensive behavioural, biochemical, and pharmacological evaluations, ophthalmic acid was validated as an alternative neurotransmitter.

A significant obstacle in Parkinson's therapy is the incapacity of neurotransmitters to traverse the blood-brain barrier, necessitating the administration of L-Dopa to patients for conversion to dopamine inside the brain.

They are now developing medications that either provide ophthalmic acid to the brain or augment the brain's capacity to synthesise it as they further investigate the whole neurological role of this molecule.

Ophthalmic acid functions as a neurotransmitter regulating motor activity. It enhanced mobility for almost 20 hours in Parkinson's murine mice. This finding provides new opportunities for the treatment of movement disorders such as Parkinson's disease.

And who knows, with this new molecule, L-Dopa might soon find itself... “out of commission!” - **The HEALTH**



The torn knee

Understanding multi-ligament knee injuries



BONE TO PICK



Dr Jonas Fernandez is an Orthopaedic Surgeon at Putrajaya Hospital. He is also a member of the Malaysian Arthroscopy Society (MAS).

A MULTI-LIGAMENT knee injury occurs when two or more of the ligaments in the knee are damaged or torn, typically due to high-impact trauma or sudden force.

The knee is a complex joint, and understanding its structure and the role of the ligaments is critical to grasping the significance of multi-ligament injuries.

Firstly, let us have a look at the anatomy of the knee and the ligaments that contribute to stabilising them. The knee is stabilised by four primary ligaments: the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL), posterior cruciate ligament (PCL), medial collateral ligament (MCL), and lateral collateral ligament (LCL).

These ligaments work together to maintain joint stability, control motion, and protect against injury. The ACL and PCL are crucial for controlling forward and backward movement of the tibia (shin bone) in relation to the femur (thigh bone), while the MCL and LCL help stabilise the knee against side-to-side stresses.

So, what causes these injuries, and who are at risk?

Multi-ligament knee injuries are often the result of high-energy trauma, such as motor vehicle accidents, contact sports (e.g., football, soccer, or skiing), or accidents involving falls from significant heights.

The combination of forces applied to the knee joint during such events can cause severe damage to the ligaments, bone, and cartilage, making these injuries particularly serious.

HIGH-RISK SPORTS

It is not uncommon for these injuries to be associated with fractures around the knee joint. In these instances, fracture union takes precedence over ligament reconstruction.

Specific individuals may be more prone to multi-ligament knee injuries, including athletes who participate in high-risk sports or individuals with pre-existing knee instability or previous knee injuries.

Additionally, people with insufficient muscle strength around the knee joint or poor proprioception (the body's ability to sense its position in space) may be at greater risk for sustaining such injuries.

MRI IS BENEFICIAL

What are the symptoms, and how are they diagnosed?

The symptoms of a multi-ligament knee injury can vary depending on the



“The recovery process can be lengthy, often taking six to 12 months or longer, depending on the severity of the injury and the individual’s progress.”

severity and the specific ligaments involved. Common symptoms include:

- Severe knee pain, especially during movement or weight-bearing activities.
- Swelling and bruising around the knee.
- Instability or the sensation that the knee may “give way”.
- Limited range of motion due to pain or swelling.

To diagnose a multi-ligament injury, doctors typically perform a physical examination. They may use imaging techniques such as X-rays, MRI, or CT scans to assess the extent of the damage to the ligaments, bones, and cartilage.

An MRI is beneficial for visualising soft tissues like ligaments and tendons. So, how are such injuries treated?

Treatment for a multi-ligament knee injury often involves a combination of surgery, rehabilitation, and physical therapy. In most cases, surgery is required to repair the damaged ligaments and restore knee stability.

Surgical options may include ligament reconstruction, tendon repair, and cartilage restoration, depending on the extent of the damage.

After surgery, rehabilitation is criti-

cal to regain strength, flexibility, and function in the knee joint. Physical therapy focuses on improving the range of motion, strengthening the muscles around the knee, and restoring balance and coordination.

The recovery process can be lengthy, often taking six to 12 months or longer, depending on the severity of the injury and the individual's progress.

In some cases, conservative treatments such as bracing, rest, ice, compression, and elevation (RICE) may be used in less severe injuries. However, surgery is typically the preferred method for restoring full function.

Multi-ligament knee injuries are severe and complex conditions that require prompt diagnosis and careful management.

These injuries often involve lengthy recovery times and may require a combination of surgical intervention and rehabilitation to restore knee function.

With the right approach to treatment and rehabilitation, many individuals can return to their normal activities and regain full mobility. However, the recovery process can be challenging and demands patience and commitment. -

The HEALTH

The top 10 main advantages of pre-planning for a worry-free life



Enjoy the 0% instalment plan to save even more in the long run (low down payment and long instalment period)



Prevent family disputes over the choice of religious funeral rites and ideas



Ease the financial burden of your family



Opportunity and time to compare and choose the best bereavement care service providers



Avoid hasty decisions during critical moment of bereavement



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Avoid the trouble of unfinished affairs



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