

The HEALTH



Pioneering a new era

UTAR Hospital Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Medical Director Dato' Dr Ding Lay Ming shares how the hospital is redefining accessible, high-quality healthcare by seamlessly integrating modern medicine with traditional healing. **P08-10**



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The HEALTH says...

Fees and fairness

THE ongoing discussion about raising consultation fees by Malaysian private general practitioners (GPs) reflects the larger issues in the healthcare sector.

The Federation of Private Medical Practitioners Associations Malaysia (FPMAM) is pushing for a fee revision. This conversation is happening against a backdrop of rising medical costs and inflation that have increased significantly over the last twenty years.

FPMAM President Dr Shanmuganathan Ganeson pointed out that consultation fees had not changed for 19 years, highlighting the gap between healthcare costs and actual economic conditions.

With rising expenses for rent, utilities, and medical supplies, GPs find themselves struggling with a fee structure that is no longer effective, threatening the future of many small clinics. The proposed increase in fees from RM10-RM35 to RM50-RM150 is presented as a necessary change rather than just a way to make more money, but it raises significant concerns among the public.

Higher fees could place more strain on middle-income families, possibly pushing them towards an already stressed public healthcare system. The risk of worsening inequalities in healthcare access is significant and should not be ignored.

This situation presents a complex mix of financial needs and ethical health services. On one side, GPs need fair pay to keep their practices running; on the other, healthcare must remain affordable for everyone. The main issue is how the government and private sector can work together to maintain the financial health of medical practices while ensuring that the public has access to essential healthcare services.

Regulations need to adapt alongside these fee changes. For example, better transparency in drug prices is vital for building trust between patients and healthcare providers. The government must play an active role in creating a system that controls drug prices while allowing consultation fees to reflect actual service costs.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad mentioned in Parliament that the ministry is working with the Department of Statistics Malaysia to figure out reasonable consultation fees for private GPs. The department will gather and analyse data to ensure accurate information in this process.

Overall, the discussion about raising consultation fees should lead to a broader conversation about our healthcare system. When looking at fee changes, we must also think about improving service quality and ensuring fair access to care.

This all-encompassing approach will not only help keep private practices viable but also protect the health of the public, creating a healthcare environment that values both provider sustainability and patient welfare.

Finding a balance between fair pay for GPs and affordability for patients is challenging. As the government and associations discuss this issue, they must ensure that today's decisions do not lead to more significant problems in the future.

A careful and cooperative approach will be crucial in building a healthcare system that benefits all Malaysians.



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Setting new regulations

FROM Mar 1 this year, the Traditional and Complementary Medicine Act 2016 [Act 775] will come into full effect, aiming to regulate traditional and complementary medicine (T&CM) services across Malaysia to ensure the safety and well-being of the public.

The enforcement of Act 775 has already entered its third phase as of Aug 1, 2024, with the transition period concluding on Feb 28, 2025. Individuals found in violation of the provisions set forth by the Act may face legal repercussions, including fines and other penalties.

The Act recognises seven areas of practice, namely, Traditional Malay Medicine; Traditional Chinese Medicine; Traditional Indian Medicine; Homeopathy; Chiropractic;

Osteopathy; and Islamic Medical Practices.

All T&CM practitioners operating within these recognised areas are required to register with the Traditional and Complementary Medicine Council established under the Act. This registration process ensures that practitioners meet the necessary qualification criteria and adhere to the mandatory practice standards.

Since the phased implementation of Act 775 began on Aug 1, 2016, the Traditional and Complementary Medicine Division (BPTK) has actively promoted various awareness initiatives targeted at both practitioners and the general public.

Publicity efforts have included exhibitions, informative talks, media interviews, and outreach

through social media. Additionally, educational visits to practitioners have been conducted since 2010 to strengthen direct engagement.

As of Dec 31, 2024, a total of 40,096 practitioners have participated in briefing sessions regarding the registration and compliance requirements of the Act. While registration for T&CM practitioners in the recognised practice areas began on Mar 15, 2021, a transition period has been allowed until Feb 28, 2025. By the end of 2024, 14,047 practitioners had successfully registered with the T&CM Council.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has emphasised that the enforcement of Act 775 is crucial for ensuring that T&CM services are provided safely and professionally. With these regulations, the MoH aims to:



SAFE PRACTICES: Consumer protection is at the forefront as the Traditional and Complementary Medicine Act 2016 sets standards for safe and effective treatments.

Protect consumers from the risks of unsafe or ineffective T&CM services;

1. Protect consumers from the risks associated with unsafe or ineffective T&CM services.
2. Ensure that practitioners within recognised practice areas operate based on established competencies and standards.
3. Foster the development of a structured and integrity-driven T&CM industry.

Focus on the digital revolution

THE National Medical Assistant Day 2025 Celebration Ceremony was officially opened on Mar 10 by Minister of Health Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad, at the Perdana Auditorium, Tunku Azizah Hospital.

This year's event was themed 'Digital Revolution: The Evolution of Smart Medical Assistants', highlighting the vital role of Medical Assistants (MAs) in adapting to the ongoing digital transformation within Malaysia's health system.

As the nation undergoes rapid digitalisation, technology has become integral in enhancing service efficiency and improving patient care. The role of MAs is evolving; they are not only implementers of treatment but also key drivers of health innovation through the application of digital technologies.

To support the growth of over 25,000 MAs in Malaysia and align with the demands of the health system, the Ministry of Health (MoH) has intensified its training and recruitment efforts. In 2024, the Ministry welcomed 807 new trainees to the MoH Training Institute (ILKMM), with an additional 462 trainees recruited in the first session of 2025.

Moreover, 283 students are currently enrolled in the Diploma in Medical and Health Sciences programme at private institutions, reinforcing the country's commitment to developing high-quality MAs.



EMPOWER & EVOLVE: Celebrating the vital contributions of Medical Assistants and their evolution in a digital world

In a bid to enhance the professionalism and expertise of these professionals, the Ministry is also strengthening the "Assistant Medical Officer Technical Expert" (AMOTeX) registration, which serves as a regulatory platform ensuring that skilled PPAs are retained within the Ministry's expertise services.

With the increasing responsibilities of MAs, the MoH is optimistic that Malaysia can emerge as a model for a more efficient, innovative, and globally competitive digital health system.

The event was attended by notable figures, including Director-General of Health Datuk Dr Muhammad Radzi Abu Hassan; Deputy Director-General of Health (Medical) Dato' Indera Dr Nor Azimi Yunus; Deputy Director-General of Health (Public Health) Datuk Dr. Norhayati Rusli; and Chief Assistant Medical Officer of Malaysia Zulhelmi Abdullah, alongside senior officials from the MoH.

Addressing pharmaceutical waste

THE Alpro Foundation and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) have launched a collaboration to tackle the urgent issue of pharmaceutical waste disposal in Malaysia. Alarmingly, 67 per cent of Malaysians improperly discard expired medications, often contaminating vital water sources, with 99 per cent of domestic water derived from surface water.

A study by the Malaysian Ministry of Health (MoH) found that only 15 per cent of the population is aware of safe disposal methods. Pharmaceutical residues, including antibiotics, have been detected in 35 per cent of Malaysia's waterways, raising concerns for both public health and aquatic life.

The newly signed Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) outlines four key initiatives:

1. Research on Pharmaceutical Waste.
2. Stakeholder Readiness Assessment.
3. Development of Educational Tools.
4. Community Awareness Campaigns.

Since the launch of the Safe Medication Disposal Campaign in 2021, Alpro Foundation has made significant strides, including partnering with over 800 schools, collecting 100,000 pledges, and installing disposal bins in all 300 Alpro Pharmacy outlets.

In 2025, the Foundation aims to enhance its impact by conducting



KICKSTARTING CHANGE: Alpro Foundation and Universiti Teknologi MARA unite against pharmaceutical waste, paving the way for a healthier environment and community awareness

extensive data collection on pharmaceutical waste, engaging 350,000 individuals, and establishing the "Little Red House" as an educational and disposal hub.

Alpro Foundation Chief Executive Officer Ostwin Paw stated: "This MoA with UiTM marks a crucial step in protecting our environment and ensuring a healthier future."

UiTM (Negeri Sembilan Branch) Rector Prof. Dato Dr Yamin Bin Yassin highlighted that this collaboration aligns with UiTM's commitment to community engagement and sustainability, aiming to drive meaningful change in pharmaceutical waste management.

As Alpro Foundation and UiTM embark on this vital initiative, they aim to foster a culture of responsible pharmaceutical waste disposal, ensuring the protection of Malaysia's environment and public health.

IJN leads urgent reforms

MALAYSIA is grappling with a growing heart failure crisis that is exerting immense pressure on the country's healthcare system, with annual costs exceeding RM766.3 million.

This escalating issue not only imposes a significant financial burden but also results in premature fatalities, disrupts families, and adversely affects the quality of life for countless Malaysians.

In response to this urgent challenge, the National Heart Institute (IJN) launched the second edition of the IJN Heart Failure Conference 2025 at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre.

The event, officiated by senior IJN leadership, attracted over 500 of the world's foremost cardiologists, researchers, healthcare professionals, and policymakers, all convening to explore strategies aimed at transforming heart failure management in Malaysia.

IJN Chief Executive Officer Dato' Sri Dr Mohamed Ezani Md Taib stated: "This conference is not merely a gathering of experts—it is a rallying call for action."

"At IJN, we believe that innovation and excellence in cardiac care must go hand in hand with accessibility and equity. The discussions and collaborations that take place



HEARTFELT MISSION: Experts converge at the IJN Heart Failure Conference 2025, committed to tackling the urgent heart failure crisis affecting Malaysians

here will catalyse real change in how heart failure is diagnosed, treated, and managed."

Supporting this initiative, the IJN Cardiology Department Head and IJN Heart Failure Conference 2025 Organising Chairman Datuk Dr Azmee Mohd Ghazi, highlighted the significance of international collaboration in tackling the growing burden of heart failure.

"This is more than a scientific discussion - it is a movement to reshape the future of heart failure care. By uniting expertise from across the globe, we can implement bold strategies that redefine treatment approaches and enhance patient outcomes."

Themed 'Advancing Global Collaboration in Heart Failure Management', the three-day

conference features an impressive lineup of keynote addresses, expert panel discussions, and interactive workshops.

Topics of discussion include groundbreaking medical technologies, patient-centred care models, and innovative preventive strategies aimed at reducing the rising incidence of heart failure.

With heart disease remaining the leading cause of mortality in Malaysia, IJN is committed to enhancing patient care and driving forward solutions that will transform the nation's cardiovascular healthcare landscape.

The conference marks a significant step towards addressing the heart failure crisis and ensuring better health outcomes for Malaysians in the future.

Sunway named top Malaysian hospital



AMONG THE BEST (From left): Tan Mei Shin (Senior Director, Business Development and Corporate Communications), Dr Seow Vei Ken (CEO), Dato Lau Beng Long (President), Dr Khoo Chow Huat (MD, Hospital & Healthcare Operations), Dr Low Kwai Siong (Medical Director).

SUNWAY Medical Centre (SMC) was again recognised as one of the world's leading healthcare providers in the latest Newsweek's World's Best Hospitals 2025 rankings.

For the second consecutive year, SMC was honoured in the top 250 hospitals globally, improving from rank 233rd in 2024 to rank 193rd in 2025. SMC is also ranked top among hospitals in Malaysia in the 2025 rankings.

The latest rankings are based on a comprehensive survey that gathered insights from medical experts, including doctors, healthcare professionals, and hospital managers, along with data from patient surveys, hospital quality metrics, and Statista Patient-Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs) Implementation Survey.

Out of 30 countries and over 2,400 shortlisted hospitals, encompassing public hospitals, university teaching hospitals and private medical centres, only the top 250 hospitals were published in the global listing.

Sunway Healthcare Group President Dato' Lau Beng Long remarked: "As the flagship hospital of Sunway Healthcare Group, SMC takes pride in its commitment to excellence in healthcare and hospitality, which drives us to this level of international recognition."

"Being ranked among the top 250 hospitals globally, within the likes of the Mayo Clinic, The John Hopkins Hospital, Singapore General Hospital, and The University of Tokyo Hospital, for two consecutive years is a testament to the unwavering dedication of our team especially medical specialists, nurses and allied health professionals."

"We are proud to lead the way in Malaysia, and this achievement reaffirms our aim to provide the highest level of clinical care and to continue elevating the overall healthcare status in the country."

Solutions to rising healthcare costs

IN A BID to tackle the increasing costs of healthcare and insurance premiums, the Life Insurance Association of Malaysia (LIAM), the Malaysian Takaful Association (MTA), and the Persatuan Insurans Am Malaysia (PIAM) engaged in a dialogue with the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on Feb 26, 2025.

This meeting aimed to discuss sustainable healthcare financing and cost-containment strategies.

The industry expressed appreciation for the PAC's initiatives to address medical inflation and is optimistic about a proposed "whole-of-nation" approach. To support policyholders affected by recent premium adjustments, the sector has introduced several interim measures, including:

- **Premium spread:** Staggering increases over three years until 2026.
- **Capped hikes:** Limiting

annual increases to below 10 per cent for about 80 per cent of policyholders.

- **Premium freeze:** A one-year freeze for policyholders aged 60 and above on minimum MHIT plans.
- **Reinstatement:** Allowing reinstatement of lapsed policies without new underwriting.
- **Affordable products:** Launching budget-friendly MHIT options by 2025.

Key recommendations include:

1. **DRG pricing:** Enhancing transparency in healthcare charges and aligning cost structures among providers, ITOs, and TPAs.
2. **Sustainable products:** Collaborating with Bank Negara Malaysia to develop essential long-term insurance and takaful products.
3. **Cost transparency:** Publishing average treatment costs and

annual medical inflation rates to empower consumers.

4. **Co-payment models:** Introducing co-payment options for MHIT products to promote shared healthcare costs.
5. **Pharmaceutical regulation:** Working with the Ministry of Health to promote generic drugs and regulate pricing.
6. **Cost containment in hospitals:** Encouraging hospitals to freeze pricing increases during premium caps.
7. **Tax exemption:** Advocating for a reduction in the Sales and Service Tax on group insurance to incentivise employer coverage.
8. **Independent study:** Conducting a detailed analysis to reduce claims inflation and recommend practical actions.
9. **Healthy lifestyle incentives:** Promoting no-claim bonuses to reward policyholders for maintaining good health.

Global healthcare, local impact

THE Indonesia-Japan Fast Track Pitch programme, organised by the Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO), has led to the partnership between Living Lab Ventures (LLV) and MEDRING Corporation (MEDRING).

LLV, an Indonesian capital firm, and the Japanese medical technology company MEDRING signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to establish Indonesia's first medical facility where Japanese doctors can legally practice in Indonesia. The facility will operate in full compliance with local medical regulations.

This partnership represents a significant development

for Indonesia's healthcare sector. JETRO Executive Director Hiroshi Ishikawa noted: "This collaboration is an excellent example of co-creation as outlined in 'ASEAN-Japan Economic Co-Creation Vision'."

The programme proved instrumental in fostering valuable connections.

According to LLV Partner Bayu Seto: "The Fast Track programme was a crucial step in identifying and engaging with pioneering companies like MEDRING that align with our mission to enhance Indonesia's healthcare ecosystem."

MEDRING Founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Kazuma Abe added: "JETRO's Fast Track Pitch provided us with the opportunity



NEW ALLIANCES: LLV and MEDRING formalise partnership with MoU signing.

to explore the Indonesian market and align our digital healthcare solutions."

The new medical centre will be located within the Banten International Education, Technology, and Health Special Economic Zone (SEZ), with plans to open its first clinic by the end of the year.

MEDRING will facilitate the mergers or acquisitions (M&A) of local healthcare businesses to streamline clinic operations. Special emphasis will be placed on enhancing digital healthcare

services.

With the integration of Japanese medical expertise and technology, Indonesian patients will gain access to higher-quality treatments. To address the healthcare needs of Indonesians, LLV and MEDRING will undertake a comprehensive assessment of the most essential medical specialities prior to the clinic's launch.

This initiative not only enhances patient care but also promises to attract more international healthcare businesses to Indonesia.



UAE to lead digital health

THE application of artificial intelligence (AI) for disease diagnosis is rapidly expanding worldwide. In light of this trend, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) seeks to position itself as a frontrunner in incorporating AI into its healthcare practices.

Emirates Health Services (EHS) has introduced AI-driven diagnostic solutions in its Medical Examination Centres for Residency, facilitating quicker and more reliable screening of pulmonary tuberculosis (TB).

EHS Acting Executive Director of the Supportive Health Services Sector, Dr Abdullah Al-Naqbi, noted that since implementing AI technology, the accuracy of TB detection has significantly improved.

The accuracy rate has increased from 80 per cent in 2021 to 98 per cent by 2024. This remarkable transformation underscored the advancements in AI capabilities for high-precision imaging analysis.

Dr Abdullah highlighted the role of digital innovation in sustainable healthcare. With the integration of AI in TB diagnosis, doctors can achieve greater accuracy and initiate treatment promptly.

With the integration of technology, EHS is taking bold steps to enhance the quality of healthcare services. This approach also aligns with the country's sustainable development goals, which include curbing the spread of infectious diseases and fostering a healthier community.

Asia's first histotripsy treatment

FOR THE first time, histotripsy treatment is being offered in a private hospital in Asia: Gleneagles Hospital in Hong Kong. Compared to standard procedures, Histotripsy causes less pain and has fewer side effects.

This technology employs focused ultrasound waves to disrupt liver tumours without requiring surgical incisions, radiation, or needles.

The procedure was initially introduced in Hong Kong last August, thanks to a contribution from the Li Ka Shing Foundation to the LKS Faculty of Medicine at the University of Hong Kong.

"We are excited to be Asia's first private hospital to offer this novel treatment to local patients with our fully-trained medical team," remarked Gleneagles Hospital Hong Kong Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and IHH Healthcare North Asia Regional CEO Dr Kenneth Tsang.

Previously, the treatment was available in the public healthcare sector on a clinical trial basis.



Dr Kenneth Tsang

However, it will now commence at Gleneagles by the end of March. This will mark the installation of the first HistoSonics system in the hospital.

To improve treatment accessibility for Hong Kong residents, the Li Ka Shing Foundation will provide at least a 15 per cent discount on the treatment package.

"Gleneagles strives to drive excellent clinical outcomes and personalised patient care through actively introducing innovative and cutting-edge treatments, and we believe this groundbreaking technology will be a game-changer for cancer treatment and regional patients," he added.





Reducing waiting times

THE New Zealand National-led government has plans to reinstate five key healthcare targets that the previous Labour-led government removed. This was a promise made during the election campaign. Health Minister Simeon Brown is determined to improve patients' access to general practitioner (GP) appointments by reducing wait times to under a week. He stressed the need to secure expert input and adequate resources in pursuit of this objective.

In March 2024, five targets to be met by 2030 were outlined:

- Cancer treatment: 90 per cent of patients to receive treatment within 31 days following the decision to initiate treatment.
- Immunisation rates: 95 per cent of children immunised by the

age of 24 months.

- Emergency departments: 95 per cent of patients shall be either admitted, discharged or transferred within six hours.
- First specialist assessment: 95 per cent of patients seen within a four-month timeframe.
- Elective treatment: A four-month wait target to be met for 95 per cent of patients.

While the measured areas regressed under the previous government, Brown acknowledged that the healthcare system did not improve during the national government's first year in office either. This recognition led to the initiative to reinstate the targets.

Although hospital funding has increased by 51 per cent in the past six years, primary care funding has only risen by 43 per cent. Brown



Simeon Brown

emphasised the need for a better balance in resource allocation. He stated that the government must hold the healthcare system accountable to ensure that funding leads to better access and improved medical outcomes.

To keep the public informed, Brown assured that quarterly reports on healthcare performance would be released soon.

Wellvana's strategic resource acquisition

WELLVANA has expanded its operations by acquiring CVS Health's Medicare Shared Savings Programme (MSSP), which was formerly overseen by CVS Accountable Care™.

This acquisition was executed through an all-stock transaction, granting CVS Health a financial stake in Wellvana's growth.

"Primary care is the engine that reduces cost while improving the health of our communities, and we're on a mission to make it life-changing," said Wellvana President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Kyle Wailes.

Wellvana's approach to supporting healthcare providers in value-based care is now enhanced by the addition of CVS Health's expertise and scale. The company currently supports healthcare providers across 40 states and serves approximately one million Medicare patients.

"Our high-touch approach that supports physicians, health systems and payors in value-based care has proven effective. The complementary expertise and scale of CVS Health's MSSP business supercharges our impact and accelerates our drive to make patients the ultimate beneficiaries of more valuable care."

Through this acquisition, Wellvana has strengthened its Accountable Care Organisation (ACO) presence and its affiliated networks. This move also grants Wellvana access to advanced technology and industry insights from CVS Health's MSSP business.

At the same time, CVS Health remains committed to value-based care. The company decided to transfer this part of its business to Wellvana, believing that Wellvana is better equipped to invest and grow the programme.

Physicians who join Wellvana through this acquisition will have access to additional resources, such as scheduling assistance, administrative support, and value-based care training.

Over time, they may also qualify for Foundational Care™, a programme that provides medical management between appointments and post-hospitalisations.

Healthy again, priced right

THE President of the United States, Donald J. Trump, signed an executive order to implement stringent regulations on healthcare price transparency. This initiative is part of the broader 'Make America Healthy Again' movement.

The 2025 EO, 'Making America Healthy Again by Empowering Patients with Clear, Accurate, and Actionable Healthcare Pricing Information,' builds upon EO 13877, which Trump signed in 2019.

Strengthening previous reforms, the 2025 EO directs federal agencies to act within 90 days. The Departments of the Treasury, Labour, and Health and Human Services are tasked with ensuring immediate compliance and addressing



Donald Trump

previous delays under the Biden administration.

In the next quarter, hospitals and insurers are expected to disclose the exact costs of medical services and prescription drug prices. Additionally, the new order

mandates standardised pricing to facilitate cost comparison across different healthcare providers and insurers.

Through the EO, American citizens will have greater agency over their healthcare choices. Stricter enforcement policies will also be implemented to ensure compliance.

"Our goal was to give patients the knowledge they need about the real price of healthcare services. They'll be able to check them, compare them, and go to different locations so they can shop for the highest-quality care," stated Trump.

Ultimately, by enabling patients to make cost-effective choices, the EO helps drive healthcare costs down.

Bridging modern and traditional medicines

- UTAR Hospital provides specialist care to underserved communities in Kampar and surrounding areas.
- As a not-for-profit hospital, UTAR Hospital provides affordable healthcare while ensuring sustainability and maintaining financial transparency through audits and governance.
- UTAR Hospital empowers communities through public health education and outreach programmes.

BY FARISHA RAHMAN

AS Malaysia's healthcare landscape evolves, UTAR Hospital has emerged as a pioneering institution that seamlessly integrates modern medicine with Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM).

In an exclusive interview with **The HEALTH**, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Medical Director of UTAR Hospital Dato' Dr Ding Lay Ming shared the hospital's mission, challenges, and aspirations.

Built on the same ethos as Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), the hospital is committed to providing accessible and affordable healthcare, particularly for communities in and around Kampar.

By offering both specialist medical care and time-honored healing traditions such as Chinese, Ayurvedic, and Malay medicine, UTAR Hospital is redefining holistic patient care in Malaysia.

Despite the complexities of integrating two distinct medical approaches, UTAR Hospital remains steadfast in its goal: to create a healthcare model where modern science and traditional wisdom work hand in hand for the benefit of all.

FOR THE PEOPLE

UTAR Hospital was established with the same philosophy as Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) to provide quality services to those who may not have access to expensive alternatives.

"The pioneers who set up UTAR had the vision to provide affordable education, and the same ethos was applied to



healthcare," explained Dr Ding.

"This hospital was built by the people, for the people, with the core mission of ensuring that healthcare remains accessible, particularly for the communities in and around Kampar."

Specialist care, often unavailable in smaller towns, is now within reach for residents of Perak's southern region. The hospital prioritises patient-centred care, ensuring that individuals receive medical attention as close to home as possible.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

UTAR Hospital uniquely houses two key healthcare components: a modern medical centre and a T&CM division. While this integration brings immense benefits, it also presents challenges.

"Blending Western and traditional medicine practices is not easy. But we designed this hospital with the intention of ensuring these two approaches complement each other," explained Dr Ding.

The T&CM division began operations in 2022, a year before the medical centre launched in August 2023. The hospital has since worked diligently to ensure a smooth collaboration between the two.

"Different patients come with different healthcare needs. There is a growing demand for traditional medicine - Chinese, Ayurvedic, and Malay traditional medicine. Our goal is to balance and align these approaches to ensure comprehensive patient care."

SEAMLESS INTEGRATION

To ensure the best outcomes, UTAR Hospital has established a structured referral system between its two divisions. Patients seeking traditional treatments may still require modern medical intervention.

"Our practitioners refer cases requiring emergency or specialised medical attention to our Emergency Department, where our physicians conduct a thorough review and provide appropriate treatment," Dr Ding explained.

Clear guidelines ensure that both arms of healthcare work in tandem for the well-being of patients.

As a not-for-profit entity, UTAR Hospital operates under the UTAR Education Foundation and relies heavily on

donations.

Maintaining financial stability while keeping healthcare affordable is a delicate balance.

"We adopt a business-conscious approach to sustain operations. Our pricing structure reflects actual service costs with a minimal margin, allowing us to remain competitive while serving those in need," she added.

Additionally, a welfare committee assesses cases where financial aid is required, ensuring that underprivileged patients receive the necessary support.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Beyond medical services, UTAR Hospital actively engages with the community.

"We conduct public health awareness programmes, visiting schools, markets, and religious institutions to educate people on chronic diseases, mental health, and elderly care," Dr Ding highlighted.

These initiatives provide vital health screenings and preventive care at affordable rates.

The hospital is exploring collaboration with NGOs, including the Malaysian Mental Health Association, offering psychiatric expertise and public awareness campaigns.

"Our specialists are always ready to contribute to these programmes because community enrichment is at the heart of our mission," she affirmed.

UTAR Hospital plays a crucial role in training future healthcare professionals.

"Although we are in the early stages, we foresee strong collaboration with UTAR University," Dr Ding stated.

The hospital will provide hands-on learning opportunities for medical students and allied health trainees, expanding their exposure to real-world clinical environments.

ENSURING ACCESSIBILITY

To enhance accessibility, the hospital has established infrastructure and programmes catering to individuals with disabilities and financial constraints.

"Our physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy services are well-developed, ensuring comprehensive support for various disabilities," she emphasised. - **The HEALTH**



Advancing integrated healthcare: Vision and Impact

AS A pioneering not-for-profit medical institution, UTAR Hospital has redefined healthcare in Malaysia by integrating Western medicine with Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM).

With a strong commitment to affordability, quality care, and innovation, the hospital has rapidly expanded its services to meet growing community needs.

In this Q&A with UTAR Hospital Chief Executive Officer and Medical Director Dato' Dr Ding Lay Ming, **The HEALTH** explores the hospital's approach to integrating different medical disciplines, its financial sustainability as a not-for-profit hospital, and its plans for future growth.

From overcoming operational challenges to expanding specialised services, the hospital will play a vital role in shaping Malaysia's healthcare landscape.

Here, Dr Ding shares insights into their mission, ongoing initiatives, and the hospital's vision for the future.

HOSPITAL OPERATIONS

The Health: What have been the key challenges in integrating Western and Traditional Medicine at UTAR Hospital?

Dr Ding: One of the main challenges has been creating a seamless integration of these two disciplines while maintaining high patient care standards. Striking the right balance requires ongoing collaboration, evidence-based approaches, and a commitment to patient-centred care. The hospital's strong, system-driven approach ensures sustainable and effective healthcare services.

The Health: How does the hospital integrate Western and Traditional Medicine in inpatient treatment plans?

Dr Ding: UTAR Hospital follows a structured protocol to ensure safe and practical integration. Treatment plans are tailored based on individual patient needs, with T&CM methods such as acupuncture and herbal remedies complementing Western medical procedures. For example, patients undergoing knee replacement surgery may receive pre-surgery acupuncture to reduce pain and post-surgery herbal therapy to aid recovery. Evidence-based practices ensure the effectiveness and safety of these integrated treatments.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The Health: How does UTAR Hospital secure funding and maintain financial sustainability?

Dr Ding: As a not-for-profit hospital, UTAR Hospital relies on a multi-faceted funding model, including philanthropic contributions, revenue diversification, and strategic partnerships. Generous support from donors, the UTAR Education Foundation, and corporations has played a crucial role in sustaining operations. The hospital is also exploring various partnerships, to enhance service capabilities and ensure long-term financial stability.

The Health: How does the hospital maintain transparency in its financial dealings?

Dr Ding: UTAR Hospital operates under a strict governance framework, overseen by a Board of Trustees and an independent financial audit committee. Regular external audits ensure compliance with legal regulations and donor expectations. Strict financial policies and ethical procurement practices further reinforce accountability and transparency.

The Health: How are service prices determined to remain accessible and affordable?

Dr Ding: While governed by the Private Healthcare Facilities and Services Act, the hospital ensures affordability by pricing its services cost-effectively. This pricing strategy aligns with its mission to provide high-quality healthcare that remains accessible to the community.

IMPACT & OUTREACH

The Health: Does UTAR Hospital offer programmes specifically for underprivileged communities?

Dr Ding: While there are no dedicated programmes yet, the hospital remains committed to providing affordable healthcare. For instance, its OGDS package is priced significantly lower than comparable services at other medical institutions. Additionally, the hospital's Welfare Department assists patients in financial need to ensure no one is denied medical care due to financial constraints.

The Health: How does the hospital ensure accessibility for all, including those with disabilities or financial difficulties?

Dr Ding: The hospital actively collaborates with NGOs, societies, and charitable organisations to support

patients in need. Through these partnerships, UTAR Hospital aims to expand financial aid options and healthcare access for disadvantaged groups.

The Health: Does the hospital collaborate with NGOs or community groups for charitable initiatives?

Dr Ding: UTAR Hospital has established partnerships with several third-party administrators (TPAs) and insurance providers to broaden healthcare access. While formal collaborations with NGOs are yet to be established, the hospital remains open to working with organisations that share its mission of providing affordable and high-quality healthcare.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The Health: What is your vision for the future of UTAR Hospital over the next 5-10 years?

Dr Ding: The hospital aims to be Malaysia's flagship integrative healthcare institution incorporating Western medicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Ayurveda, and Malay Traditional Medicine. In addition, UTAR Hospital plans to expand its clinical services, including cardiovascular services, and nuclear medicine. The goal is to position the hospital at the forefront of medical innovation while staying true to its community-focused mission.

The Health: What are the long-term goals regarding service expansion, community health impact, and education?

Dr Ding: UTAR Hospital plans to extend its high-quality yet affordable healthcare services while emphasising preventive healthcare and community outreach programmes. Recent initiatives, such as free health screenings and educational talks on kidney disease prevention, demonstrate the hospital's commitment to proactive healthcare awareness. Additionally, the hospital seeks to strengthen collaborations with NGOs to ensure underserved communities receive the medical attention they need. - **The HEALTH**

“The hospital aims to be Malaysia’s first genuinely integrative healthcare institution, incorporating Western medicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Ayurveda, and Malay Traditional Medicine.”

SENIOR MANAGEMENT: Dr Ding alongside other senior management members in front of UTAR Hospital.



BY FARISHA RAHMAN

MALAYSIA'S healthcare landscape has reached a new milestone with the official launch of UTAR Hospital, a pioneering institution that blends modern medical expertise with Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM).

Established under the UTAR Education Foundation, this not-for-profit hospital is dedicated to making high-quality healthcare accessible to all, particularly in Kampar and the wider Perak region.

Graced by the Sultan of Perak, Sultan Nazrin Shah, the grand opening of UTAR Hospital signified more than just the inauguration of a medical facility - it marked a bold step towards integrated, patient-centric healthcare.

With state-of-the-art medical services, specialist care, and a holistic approach to healing, UTAR Hospital will redefine affordable healthcare while bridging the gap between Western medicine and traditional healing practices.

A VISION REALISED

The UTAR Hospital, a not-for-profit medical institution, was developed with the support of the UTAR Education Foundation and generous contributions from philanthropists and the public.

With an initial investment of RM300 million, the hospital aims to serve as a premier healthcare facility that integrates both Western medicine and Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM).

Since its partial opening in 2022, UTAR Hospital has gained immense traction, recording over 130,000 patient visits. This demand underscores the need for high-quality yet accessible medical services, particularly in Kampar and the wider Perak region.

UTAR Hospital operates a full-fledged Western Medical Centre, which officially commenced in August 2023. It provides essential services in multiple disciplines, including Internal Medicine, Orthopaedics, Traumatology, Obstetrics and Gynaecology (O&G), Psychiatry, Paediatrics, General Surgery, Emergency Medicine, and Dental and Oral Surgery.

The hospital boasts a multidisciplinary ward that ensures patients receive specialised treatment in a holistic environment.

For outpatient services, the hospital houses an Outpatient Specialist Clinic that caters to diverse medical needs. It also operates an Ambulatory Service, ensuring round-the-clock emergency response, thereby enhancing the accessibility of urgent care.

The hospital's Paediatric Ward has been expanded to include evening clinics, accommodating working parents who seek medical attention for their children after office hours.

With a strong focus on maternal and child health, UTAR Hospital has also introduced an affordable Natural Delivery Package, making quality maternity care accessible to more families.



LAUNCHING CEREMONY: Sultan Nazrin Shah, accompanied by other distinguished guests and dignitaries, on the ceremony stage.

Affordable holistic healthcare

- UTAR Hospital offers holistic healthcare by integrating Western medicine with Traditional & Complementary Medicine (T&CM).
- The hospital features advanced facilities, including specialist clinics, emergency care, diagnostics, and paediatric services.
- With plans for expansion, UTAR Hospital will introduce cardiology, oncology, and neurosurgery.



Sultan Nazrin Shah officiating the symbolic launching ceremony of UTAR Hospital and signing a commemorative plaque.

STATE-OF-THE-ART

In keeping with modern medical advancements, UTAR Hospital is well-equipped with cutting-edge diagnostic tools. Its Imaging Department features a 1.5-Tesla MRI, a 128-slice CT scanner, Tomosynthesis Mammography, bone Densitometry, Digital X-ray, and Ultrasound services.

These facilities ensure accurate and efficient diagnostics, enabling better treatment planning and patient outcomes.

The hospital also provides specialised Renal Dialysis Services, an In-House Laboratory, an Endoscopy Unit, Operation Theatre, 24/7 Emergency Services, and more. Patients requiring continuous monitoring and medical intervention can benefit from the hospital's intensive care services.

One of UTAR Hospital's standout features is its integration of Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM), which includes Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ayurveda, and Malay Traditional Medicine.

The T&CM Centre, which opened

in April 2022, has treated over 100,000 patients, reflecting a strong demand for alternative and complementary healthcare solutions.

Malay Traditional Medicine services, such as post-natal treatments, therapeutic massage (Urut Melayu), and hot stone therapy (Batu Tungku), will soon be introduced to enrich the hospital's holistic healthcare approach further.

As part of its long-term vision, UTAR Hospital will introduce specialised treatment in cardiology, ophthalmology, otolaryngology (ENT), neurosurgery, nuclear medicine, transfusion medicine, and oncology.

The hospital has allocated space for further expansion, supplementing the existing 250 beds for Western medicine and 100 beds for T&CM, further solidifying its standing as a premier healthcare provider in the region.

As a tertiary not-for-profit hospital, UTAR Hospital remains committed to providing accessible, high-quality, and affordable healthcare to the community, in line with its tagline: "Enriching and Caring for the Community." Guided by the principle of "by the people, for the people," the hospital ensures that top-tier medical services remain available to all, regardless of financial background.

RESEARCH-ORIENTED

It has partnered with leading insurance providers and third-party administrators to provide coverage for various medical services. Additionally, collaborations with organisations like PERKESO, JPA, and KWAP facilitate subsidised health screening and haemodialysis programmes for eligible patients.

The hospital also offers a range of customised healthcare packages, including newborn baby assessments, children's vaccinations, total knee replacement surgeries, and general health screenings, ensuring that the community has access to essential medical services at reasonable rates.

Beyond serving as a hospital, UTAR Hospital plays a pivotal role in medical education and research. As a teaching hospital, it provides practical training and research opportunities for UTAR medical students, fostering the next generation of healthcare professionals.

The hospital's research divisions focus on innovative medical solutions and the integration of T&CM with modern medicine.

The official launch of UTAR Hospital marks a transformative chapter in Malaysia's healthcare sector. With its blend of modern medical expertise, traditional medicine integration, and unwavering commitment to affordability,

UTAR Hospital will redefine community healthcare while serving as a benchmark for holistic and sustainable medical institutions. As it continues to expand, its impact on patient care, medical education, and research will undoubtedly shape the future of healthcare in the region. - **The HEALTH**

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Multifocal lens magic

- Understanding digital eye strain and the multifocal lens solutions for modern vision challenges
- The growing demand for multifocal lenses among younger users in an era of increased screen time
- Proactive eye care: Essential recommendations for enhancing comfort and clarity with multifocal lenses

BY KHIRTINI K KUMARAN

IN AN era where screen time dominates our daily routines, the quest for comfort and clarity in vision has never been more pressing.

Optometrist and Director of Flexzoom Optometrist (MEDINI) Sdn Bhd Edmund Chong explained how multifocal contact lenses can alleviate symptoms of digital eye strain (DES), a growing concern among users of digital devices.

MULTIFOCAL LENSES FOR DES

DES manifests as discomfort, blurred vision, and fatigue, often triggered by prolonged screen exposure.

According to Chong: "Multifocal contact lenses are primarily designed to help people with presbyopia, which typically occurs around the age of 40 when the eye loses the ability to focus on close objects."

He elaborates that these lenses not only assist those with presbyopia but also offer significant relief for individuals suffering from DES.

The innovative design of multifocal lenses features different zones tailored for various focal distances.

"For the near zone, they provide a clear focus on close work, such as reading or using smartphones, while the distance zones aid in focusing on dynamic vision."

This balanced vision experience allows wearers to shift their focus between screens and distant objects with ease, reducing the strain associated with constant refocusing.

RISING TRENDS AND DEMAND

Chong observed a noticeable increase in younger patients seeking multifocal lenses, a trend driven by the rise in screen usage.

"Even now, schools are using devices to teach kids."

This shift towards digital learning has led to symptoms of DES appearing in younger demographics, prompting a demand for effective solutions.

"I prescribe multifocal contact lenses to my patients as young as 35," he shared, highlighting the need for proactive measures to combat early onset digital eye strain.

Manufacturers are responding to this demand with innovative materials and designs. Lenses with advanced moisture



Edmund Chong



retention properties or anti-reflective coatings that reduce glare are becoming increasingly popular.

Additionally, features such as blue light filtering are incorporated to protect against the harmful effects of prolonged screen exposure.

"As awareness about DES grows, more people are exploring solutions with their eye care practitioners," he added.

EYE CARE PROFESSIONALS' ROLE

Chong emphasised the importance of eye care practitioners (ECPs) discussing multifocal options with patients experiencing DES.

"This demonstrates a proactive approach, offering personalised care that can significantly improve quality of life."

By addressing both DES symptoms and potential presbyopia, optometrists can enhance patients' visual comfort and long-term eye health.

He further elaborated on the specific benefits of multifocal lenses for screen users. The smooth transition between focal points reduces eye strain when switching tasks. This feature proves invaluable for individuals who fre-



quently alternate between looking at screens and reading documents.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OPTIMAL USE

Chong offered several recommendations for those considering multifocal contact lenses.

"Choosing the right type of multifocal lenses that suits you is crucial," he advised, noting that finding the optimal fit may require some trial and error.

Regular follow-ups with ECPs are essential to ensure ongoing comfort and effectiveness. "I recommend annual eye examinations to maintain good vision."

In addition, Chong highlighted the importance of using high-quality, breathable lens materials that provide hydration and UV protection - features vital for those who spend extended hours in front of screens.

He cautioned against using incompatible lubricating eye drops, which can lead to discomfort.

"Patients often find relief by switching to daily replacement lenses, which can be more hygienic and reduce irritation," he added.

LOOKING AHEAD

Events like the Johnson & Johnson Institute Symposium (JJS) play a crucial role in raising awareness about digital eye strain. Chong believes such gatherings can drive the industry towards a more holistic and patient-centred approach to managing DES.

"By emphasising the significance of digital eye health, the symposium encourages the adoption of innovative solutions."

He expressed particular interest in discussions around DES in children and teenagers, a demographic increasingly affected by excessive screen time.

"Helping this population manage these issues will be beneficial," he said, reflecting on the concerning rise of myopia among younger users.

As digital devices continue to shape our lives, the importance of addressing DES grows. Multifocal contact lenses represent a promising solution, allowing users to navigate their digital environments with comfort and clarity.

As awareness increases and technology advances, a proactive approach to eye care will be essential in safeguarding our vision in the digital age. - **The HEALTH**



Astigmatism awareness matters

- Exploring the link between astigmatism and digital eye strain and the importance of effective vision correction
- Innovation contacts lenses technology revolutionising astigmatism correction to mitigate digital eye strain
- Continues education for eye care professionals to combat digital eye strain in an increasingly screen-dominated world

BY KHIRTINI K KUMARAN

IN TODAY'S digital age, where screen time has surged, the consequences of prolonged digital device usage have become increasingly evident.

Johnson & Johnson (J&J) Vision Care Korea Professional Education & Development Head, Youngwan Lee, offered valuable insights into the relationship between astigmatism and digital eye strain (DES), highlighting the critical need for awareness and intervention.

DIGITAL EYE STRAIN & ASTIGMATISM

DES, according to Lee, is a condition characterised by a range of eye and vision problems that arise from prolonged use of digital devices.

He described the symptoms, which include "eye discomfort and fatigue, dry eye, blurry vision", and noted that these issues can be significantly aggravated by uncorrected astigmatism.

"Uncorrected astigmatism makes your eyes strain even more to see clearer," he explained, indicating that individuals with this refractive error are particularly vulnerable to experiencing severe symptoms of DES.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CORRECTION

Lee emphasised the critical importance of correcting astigmatism to alleviate its impact on DES, pointing out that education is key in this process. Patients must be made aware of how astigmatism affects their vision and the available options for correction.

He explained: "It has been found that not every patient is aware of toric contact lenses in the market." This suggests a considerable gap in patient education regarding effective treatments.

Additionally, he urged eye care professionals (ECPs) to enhance their fitting practices for toric contact lenses, especially for patients with low degrees of astigmatism.

"Practitioners are already doing a good job in prescribing toric contact lenses," he acknowledged.

However, he pointed out that there is significant room for improvement, particularly for those with low amounts



Youngwan Lee

of astigmatism, which are more likely to cause strain than higher astigmatism.

Despite this, many practitioners tend to prefer masking with spherical lenses for patients with astigmatism levels equal or lower than -0.75, potentially leaving these individuals at risk for increased discomfort and strain.

The Covid-19 pandemic seems to have drastically altered screen usage patterns. Lee mentioned, referring to Jobson Optical Research (Jan 2021), that the research showed many practitioners reported more patients are reporting issues related to screen time. Correcting astigmatism is becoming more important and critical for patients.

To minimize a number of people who are navigating their daily lives

with uncorrected astigmatism, the awareness of toric contact lenses needs to be improved and practitioners should be more active on fitting toric contact lenses.

CONTACT LENSES TECHNOLOGY

Technological advancements in contact lenses design are pivotal in managing the effects of DES for astigmatic patients. Unlike spectacles, which maintain lens stability, toric contact lenses can rotate in the eye, potentially inducing unwanted astigmatism.

Lee explained that recent innovations aim to minimise this rotation, allowing for proper correction and clearer vision.

"Advancements in contact lenses technology have managed to minimise this rotation so that toric contact lenses can correct astigmatism properly."

J&J distinguishes itself with innovative design feature aimed at stabilising toric contact lenses. The "eyelid stabilising design" has four stabilising zones to prevent rotation.

Lee elaborated: "This design with four stabilising zones at the corners interacts with the blinks to stabilise the contact lenses".

Patients are advised to seek the advice of ECPs when considering toric contact lenses.

This development is particularly significant, given that individuals blink approximately 13,000 times a day, a factor that can significantly affect contact lenses positioning.

CONTINUOUS EDUCATION

Continuous education plays a vital role in equipping ECPs with the knowledge necessary to combat DES effectively.

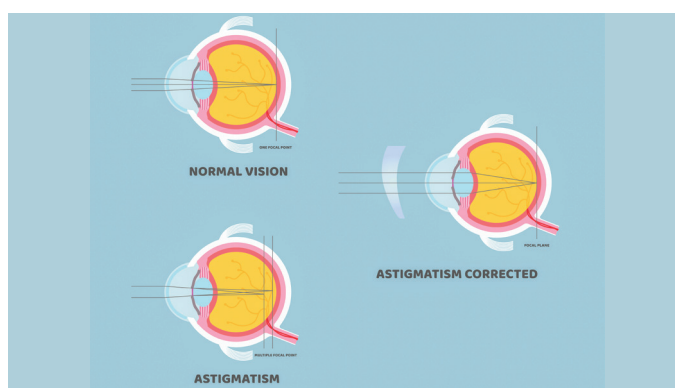
"Education is always important because you need to learn every day," Lee stressed.

He highlighted that staying informed about the latest advancements in technology and treatment options will help ECPs serve their patients better.

"As professionals, we must inform and help the patients with the right solutions," he asserted, highlighting the need for practitioners to be proactive in their education.

J&J is committed to fostering this educational environment. "We are dedicated to delivering comprehensive learning resources and updates on the latest advancements in eye health care for ECPs eager to stay sharp and enhance their patient care," stated Lee.

As screen time continues to rise, the interplay between astigmatism and digital eye strain remains a pressing issue. Lee's insights highlight the need for improved patient education and corrective measures to alleviate the symptoms of DES. - **The HEALTH**



Protect your vision

- Understanding the causes, symptoms, and the impact of increased screen time in modern life
- Insights on lifestyle adjustments and eye care practices
- The role of education, ergonomics and community engagement in promoting eye health

BY KHIRTINI K KUMARAN

THE phenomenon of digital eye strain (DES) has emerged as a pressing concern, affecting individuals across all demographics.

With the rise of remote work, online learning, and the pervasive use of smartphones, many are experiencing a range of uncomfortable symptoms linked to prolonged screen exposure.

Insightful Eye Care Optometrist and Co-founder Darran Yeow offered valuable insights into the nature of DES, its symptoms, and the environmental factors that exacerbate it.

As awareness grows, the importance of proactive management and lifestyle adjustments becomes paramount in safeguarding our eye health.

Darran Yeow



WHAT IS DIGITAL EYE STRAIN?

Digital eye strain refers to a collection of eye-related issues stemming from excessive use of screens - be it smartphones, tablets, or computers.

Darran explained: "Digital eye strain basically refers to a group of eye or vision-related problems essentially due to overuse of digital devices."

This condition, sometimes referred to as computer vision syndrome, affects a significant portion of the population as the duration of screen time continues to increase.

According to Darran, the risk of developing DES correlates directly with the amount of time spent on digital devices.

"The more screen time that you have, the more risk or potential risk you have of DES." As our reliance on technology grows, particularly with remote work and online learning, so does the incidence of this condition.

SYMPTOMS & AGGRAVATING FACTORS

The symptoms of DES are varied and can significantly impact daily life. Darran outlined common complaints, including eye fatigue, dry eyes, and headaches.

"When you don't blink as much when you're staring at a screen, the front of the eye dries out."

This lack of blinking can lead to discomfort, blurry vision, and even neck and back pain as users adjust their posture to cope with visual strain.

Darran elaborated that

dry eyes may manifest as a burning or gritty sensation, making it uncomfortable for individuals to focus. Additionally, fluctuating vision can occur due to an unstable tear film, which is essential for clear sight.

"In order for you to see clearly, the front surface needs to be nice and smooth," he added, emphasising the importance of maintaining eye moisture.

Environmental factors also play a crucial role in aggravating DES. Darran highlighted how varying climates can exacerbate symptoms: "In Australia, it's very dry, while in Malaysia, the air conditioning tends to dry the air out." Such conditions can further destabilise the tear film on the eye's surface, exacerbating discomfort.

He also noted that reflections and glare from screens can also worsen symptoms, making it essential for users to be mindful of their work environments.

TRENDS IN DIGITAL EYE STRAIN

Darran noted that the prevalence of DES is on the rise, particularly among younger demographics. A recent study revealed that teenagers average eight to nine hours of screen time per day, a stark increase compared to previous generations.

"Up to probably even 50 per cent of kids are experiencing some form of eye strain," he observed, attributing this to online learning and increased smartphone use during the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally altered work and learning environments, leading to increased reliance on screens.

Darran pointed out that many adults now work in hybrid models, spending substantial time on video calls and digital meetings. This shift has resulted in

Managing digital eye strain

Insightful Eye Care Optometrist and Co-founder Darran Yeow offered valuable strategies to mitigate the effects of digital eye strain (DES), enhancing comfort and maintaining visual health amidst prolonged screen use.

He advocated for proactive measures to combat the discomfort associated with extensive screen usage.

● Implementing the 20-20-20 Rule

One of Darran's key recommendations is the 20-20-20 rule. This simple yet effective strategy involves taking a break every 20 minutes to look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.

"This allows your eye muscles to relax," he explained, noting

that frequent breaks can significantly reduce eye strain and fatigue.

● Enhancing Blink Frequency

Another straightforward tactic Darran suggested is to blink more often consciously. "When staring at screens, we tend to blink less, which can lead to dry eyes."

By making a conscious effort to blink regularly, individuals can help maintain tear film stability and keep their eyes lubricated.

● Optimising Screen Positioning

Ergonomics plays a pivotal role in alleviating DES. Darran recommended positioning screens at eye level and approximately 50 to 70 centimetres away.

This setup encourages a more natural posture and reduces the strain on the neck and back, which can compound the discomfort associated with prolonged screen use.

"Your feet should be on the ground and your back well supported," he advised, highlighting the importance of a conducive workspace.

● Managing Environmental Factors

Environmental conditions can exacerbate DES symptoms. Darran suggested using a humidifier in dry environments to counteract the effects of air conditioning or heating, which can lead to dry eyes.

Additionally, controlling room lighting is crucial. "Avoid bright, harsh lighting and

reflections from screens," he noted. A well-lit room with consistent, soft lighting can help reduce glare and enhance visual comfort.

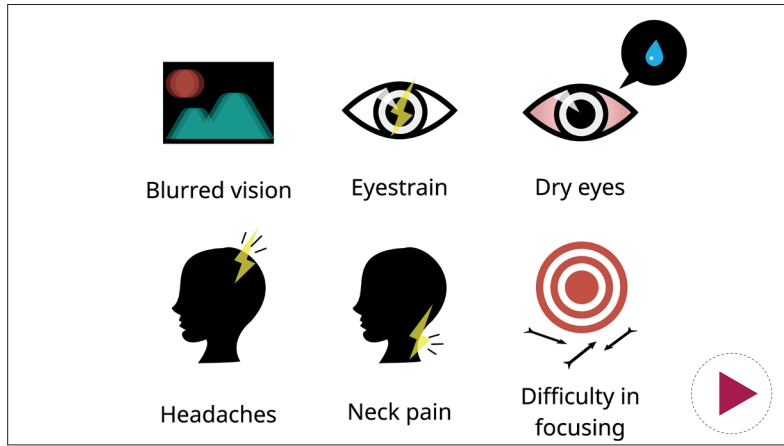
● Incorporating Artificial Tears

For individuals experiencing persistent dryness, Darran recommends the use of artificial tears or lubricating eye drops.

These products can help maintain moisture levels and provide relief from discomfort. "If your eyes need a little lubrication, these drops can keep the tear film stable."

● Staying Hydrated and Maintaining a Healthy Diet

Hydration is vital for overall eye health. Darran advised individuals to drink plenty of water throughout the day, as dehydration can exacerbate



Digital eye strain symptoms.

“back-to-back” screen time, leaving little opportunity for eye breaks.

A BEACON OF AWARENESS

Darran is optimistic about the upcoming Johnson & Johnson Institute Symposium (JJI), anticipating it will serve as a vital platform for raising awareness about digital eye strain.

“The idea of the symposium and having people come together is just raising awareness.” He hopes the event will encourage discussions about lifestyle choices, ergonomics, and the importance of regular eye care.

He believes that industry leaders, eye care professionals (ECPs), and the media can collaborate to make DES a prominent topic of conversation. “The more that people become aware, the easier it is for us to have those conversations with patients.”

He emphasised the importance of equipping professionals with the knowledge and tools necessary to tackle DES effectively. By fostering a

dialogue around the implications of increased screen time, Darran hopes the symposium will lead to innovative solutions for managing DES.

“If digital screen usage is not going to go away, then what can we do to provide knowledge and visual solutions?” he asked, highlighting the need for ongoing education and awareness.

As digital eye strain continues to affect an ever-growing population, awareness and proactive management become essential.

Darran’s insights serve as a crucial reminder that while technology is an integral part of modern life, it is vital to prioritise eye health. Regular check-ups, smart device use, and ergonomic adjustments can make a significant difference in managing DES effectively.

Engaging in conversations at events like the JJI can further enhance understanding and pave the way for innovative approaches to this pressing issue.

dry eye symptoms.

He also emphasised the importance of a diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids, commonly found in fish. “A good diet can support eye health and reduce dryness.”

● **Regular Eye Examinations**

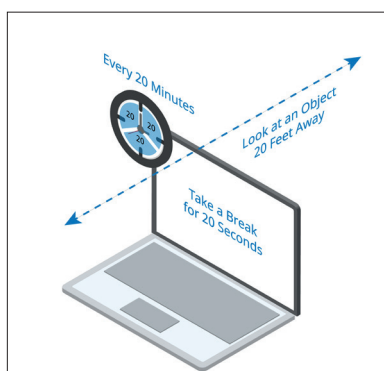
Darran stressed the importance of regular eye tests. “Catching up with your eye care professional should be close to the top of your list.”

Regular check-ups can help identify any underlying issues, such as uncorrected refractive errors, which can worsen DES.

● **Encouraging Outdoor Time**

Incorporating outdoor time into daily routines can also benefit eye health. Darran suggested that spending time outdoors, away from screens, can provide a much-needed break for the eyes.

“Even if it’s humid outside,



get up early or go out later in the day,” he encouraged, noting that natural light can help alleviate symptoms of DES.

Darran’s strategies for managing DES offer practical solutions for individuals navigating a screen-heavy lifestyle. By implementing these recommendations, individuals can enhance their visual comfort and maintain their overall eye health.

Proper eye care transforms lives

WITH the proliferation of screens in our daily lives, optometrists like Darran Yeow, co-founder of Insightful Eye Care, are witnessing firsthand the impact of this modern ailment.

Darran shared two compelling case studies that illustrate the diverse effects of DES on patients and the transformative power of proper eye care.

TEENAGER’S STRUGGLE WITH FOCUS

One notable case involves a 14-year-old boy who came to Darran’s practice complaining of significant headaches and difficulty concentrating.

“He wasn’t enjoying school much because he wasn’t able to see clearly,” Darran recalled. The boy’s issues stemmed from uncorrected short-sightedness and astigmatism, impairing his ability to see the board and causing him to lean closer to his devices.

After a thorough examination, Darran prescribed glasses with an anti-fatigue lens designed to ease the



Darran Yeow on slit lamp with patient

strain of focusing on both the classroom board and digital screens. He also fitted the teenager with contact lenses, allowing for greater comfort during sports.

“This young patient was thrilled to have a clearer vision and the confidence that came with it.

“Sometime later, during a follow-up visit, the teenager shared his success in studies, now pursuing a degree in computer science.

“He mentioned how happy he was with his vision,” Darran added, underscoring the profound impact of proper vision correction.

ACTIVE BABY BOOMER’S TRANSITION

In contrast, Darran’s second case features a baby boomer juggling multiple pairs of glasses for different tasks.

This patient, an active individual participating in triathlons, found the constant switching of glasses cumbersome. Darran suggested multifocal contact lenses to eliminate the need for multiple pairs.

“We discussed how these lenses could allow him to see clearly at all distances without the hassle.”

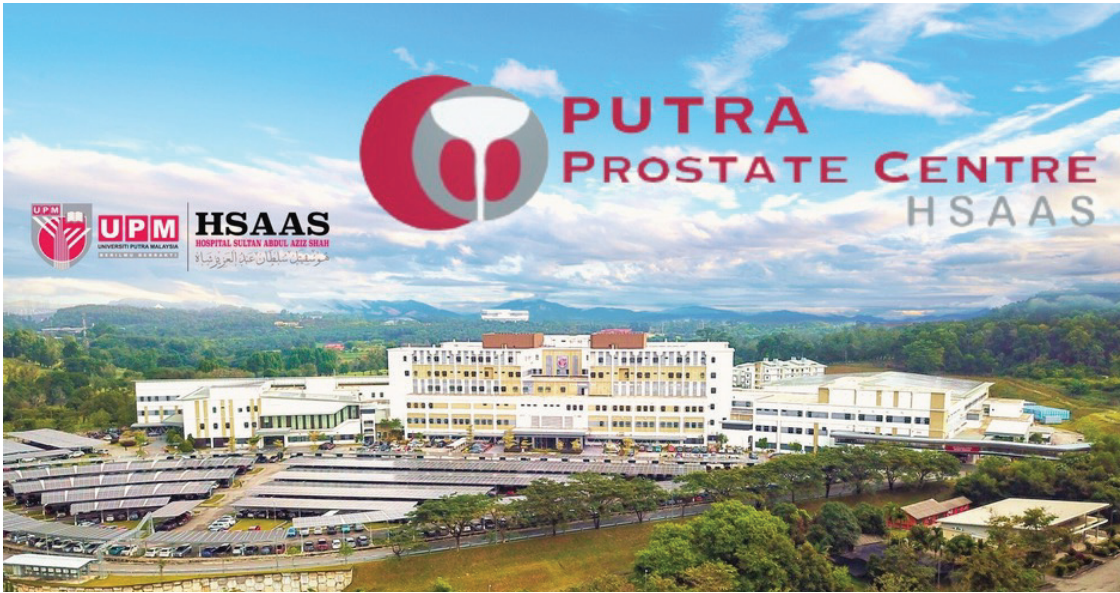
After trying several options, the patient found a comfortable fit that suited his needs. “He raved about the freedom these contact lenses provided,” Darran recounted, enhancing his overall quality of life.

These case studies highlight the varied manifestations of DES. Darran emphasises that while symptoms can differ, they often stem from prolonged screen use and uncorrected vision.

“With the rise of digital devices, we’re seeing more patients with symptoms ranging from minor discomfort to significant impairment.

“Whether it’s a teenager grappling with schoolwork or an active adult managing multiple tasks, proper eye care can make a significant difference.”

Through dedicated care and appropriate interventions, individuals can navigate their digital lives with greater ease, ensuring that their vision remains sharp and their eyes healthy. - **The HEALTH**



Transforming prostate health

- UPM Urology and HSAAS are positioning themselves as a global leader in prostate health.
- Cutting-edge treatments and minimally invasive procedures are revolutionising prostate care.
- Through partnerships with the NCI, international institutions and experts, the centre is driving advancements in prostate healthcare.

UNIVERSITY Putra Malaysia (UPM) Urology and Hospital Abdul Aziz Shah (HSAAS) have set their sights on becoming a premier one-stop and international centre for prostate health. The centre was set up in 2020.

Prostate-related diseases, remarkably benign prostatic enlargement (BPE) and prostate cancer are among the most common health concerns affecting men worldwide.

In Malaysia, the incidence of prostate cancer has been on the rise, making it imperative for healthcare institutions to offer practical, minimally invasive, and precise treatment solutions.

Malaysia's ageing population further exacerbates this issue, as prostate diseases predominantly affect older men. With life expectancy increasing and a growing proportion of elderly individuals, the demand for advanced prostate health services is more pressing than ever.

According to the National Cancer Registry, prostate cancer is the third most common cancer among Malaysian men, underscoring the need for improved early detection and treatment strategies.

TARGETTED APPROACH: Dr Vincent performs an MRI-US fusion targeted prostate biopsy, with the results on the right demonstrating precision and accuracy.

Recognising this need, UPM Urology and HSAAS have positioned themselves as a centre of excellence dedicated to improving early detection, advancing treatment modalities, and enhancing patient outcomes.

HSAAS serves as the teaching hospital for Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and is a leading Center for Clinical Excellence, providing advanced treatment, research, and education in four key niche areas:



- Regional Emergency Stroke Quick Response (ResQ)
- Prostate Care Centre (Putra Prostate Centre)
- Advanced Geriatric Care (AGILE)
- Putra Zoonotics

Since its establishment, the Putra Prostate Centre has been driven by a vision to become an internationally recognised centre for prostate care. Its mission is to provide the highest standard of evidence-based treatment for all prostate-related conditions, utilising state-of-the-art technology and cutting-edge equipment.

ADVANCED PROSTATE CARE

The centre offers a range of specialised services tailored to meet the growing needs of patients dealing with prostate-related issues. These include:

► REZUM Therapy: A game-changer for BPH

Benign prostatic enlargement (BPE) is a non-cancerous enlargement of the prostate gland that affects a significant number of ageing men, leading to urinary symptoms such as difficulty urinating, frequent urination, and incomplete bladder emptying. The centre offers REZUM Therapy, a minimally invasive procedure that uses controlled doses of water steam to shrink enlarged prostate tissue. Unlike traditional surgical methods, REZUM does not require hospitalisation and has a shorter recovery time. Patients experience significant symptom relief without compromising sexual function, making it an ideal choice for many men with BPE.

► Laser Enucleation Surgery for BPH

For patients with severe BPE requiring surgical intervention, the Laser Enucleation Surgery provides a highly effective solution. This advanced technique allows for precise removal of excess prostate tissue while minimising bleeding and reducing the risk of complications. Laser enucleation is more effective for larger prostates than conventional TURP (Transurethral Resection of the Prostate).

► Prostatic Artery Embolisation (PAE)

PAE is another treatment option offered at our centre for men with BPE. This non-surgical procedure, performed by our esteemed interventional radiologists, involves blocking blood flow to the prostate, leading to a reduction in prostate size and symptom relief. PAE is a safe and effective alternative for patients who are not candidates for surgery or prefer a minimally invasive approach with a faster recovery time.

► MRI-US Fusion Prostate Biopsy: Enhancing Cancer Detection

Early and accurate detection of prostate cancer is crucial in ensuring effective treatment and improved survival rates. Traditional prostate biopsies often rely solely on transrectal ultrasound (TRUS) guidance, which can miss clinically significant tumours, leading to overdiagnosis and overtreatment. To address



INNOVATION: HSAAS is the first public hospital in Klang Valley to offer focal therapy using high-intensity focused ultrasound (HIFU) (left) and the first in Malaysia / South East Asia to introduce targeted microwave ablation treatment for localised prostate cancer (right). Dr Vincent is on the extreme left.

these limitations, HSAAS has adopted the Koelis Trinity™ MRI-US fusion prostate biopsy system. This technology combines multiparametric magnetic resonance imaging (mpMRI) with real-time ultrasound, allowing for more accurate targeting of suspicious lesions. By superimposing MRI and ultrasound images, clinicians can precisely locate and sample areas of concern, reducing unnecessary biopsies and associated complications.

► **Robotic-Assisted Surgery: Precision and Faster Recovery**

For patients requiring surgical intervention for prostate cancer, we offer Robotic-Assisted Surgery, a minimally invasive procedure that enhances surgical precision and reduces recovery times. By using robotic technology, surgeons can perform complex procedures with increased accuracy, resulting in better cancer control, reduced blood loss, and improved post-surgical outcomes. This approach is particularly beneficial for preserving urinary and sexual function following prostate cancer surgery.

► **Focal Therapy for Prostate Cancer: A Targeted Approach**

The centre is the pioneer in Malaysia in introducing Focal Therapy for Prostate Cancer. This innovative treatment targets cancerous lesions within the prostate while preserving healthy tissue.

Unlike traditional treatments such as radical prostatectomy or radiation therapy, focal therapy minimises side effects, allowing patients to maintain a high quality of life post-treatment. This technique is particularly suitable for patients with localised prostate cancer who wish to avoid the risks associated with more invasive treatments.

► **Uro-Oncology Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Care with the National Cancer Institute**

Collaboration is key to providing the best cancer care. Our Uro-Oncology MDT Care brings together specialists from UPM Urology and the National Cancer Institute, ensuring a comprehensive and personalised treatment approach. With access to PET PSMA scans for precise cancer staging and radiotherapy options, patients receive seamless and coordinated care tailored to their

individual needs.

LEADING THE WAY

Dr Vincent Khor, a young and dynamic urologist with a special interest in prostate cancer, has been instrumental in establishing MRI-targeted prostate biopsy and focal therapy services at our centre. His dedication and expertise have positioned UPM Urology and Hospital Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah at the forefront of prostate cancer diagnostics and treatment.

HSAAS is the first in Malaysia to perform transperineal prostate biopsy under local anaesthesia and also, to date, the highest volume (> 450 cases), offering patients a safer and more comfortable alternative to the traditional transrectal approach.

This method significantly reduces the risk of infection and improves biopsy accuracy, ensuring a higher level of patient safety and diagnostic precision. The use of local anaesthesia enables patients to have this procedure done on a daycare basis.

Dr Khor has also played a pivotal role in sharing knowledge and advancing best practices in prostate cancer biopsy. He has organised two local workshops on MRI-US fusion transperineal prostate biopsy under local anaesthesia in 2022 and 2024. Additionally, he has been invited as a proctor to teach this technique in Vietnam at the 108 Mili-



MENTORING: Dr Vincent proctoring Vietnamese doctors to perform MRI-US fusion prostate biopsy.

REVOLUTION: MRI-US fusion prostate biopsy workshop 2024 - Dr Vincent demonstrates the technique to perform this procedure effectively under local anaesthesia.

tary Central Hospital in January 2025, further cementing his reputation as a leader in this field.

TARGETED MICROWAVE ABLATION (TMA)

HSAAS and Dr Vincent are pioneers in Malaysia and Southeast Asia, being the first to perform Targeted Microwave Ablation (TMA) for Localised Prostate Cancer. This groundbreaking treatment integrates organ-tracking and fusion technology.

This advanced approach precisely delivers focused microwave thermal energy to cancerous tissues, effectively destroying them while preserving surrounding healthy structures. This treatment approach effectively prevents incontinence and erectile dysfunction, which are complications commonly associated with surgery or radiotherapy.

This innovation is reshaping the treatment of localised prostate cancer, offering patients a minimally invasive alternative with promising long-term outcomes. The procedure is currently part of an ongoing clinical trial in collaboration with The Chinese University of Hong Kong, led by world-renowned focal therapy expert Prof Dr Peter Chiu.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

With an ambition to be a leading international centre, UPM Urology and Hospital Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah are continuously advancing in research, education, and clinical excellence. The focus is on:

- Early detection - Promoting awareness and encouraging regular screening for prostate diseases.
- Innovative treatment solutions - Expanding our range of minimally invasive and high-precision treatment options.
- Research and development - Collaborating with local and international institutions to advance prostate health care.
- Training the next generation - Educating and training urologists to adopt the latest technologies and best practices in prostate care.

The centre is committed to placing Malaysia on the global map for prostate health care, ensuring that men have access to world-class treatments close to home. With continuous innovation and a patient-centred approach, we are setting new standards in urological care and making significant strides in improving men's health.

As the centre continues to push the boundaries of prostate health care, it welcomes collaborations with researchers, medical professionals, and healthcare organisations to advance the field further.

Whether through clinical research, technological innovation, or educational initiatives, the centre's goal is to make a lasting impact on the lives of men facing prostate conditions. - **The HEALTH**



SETTING STANDARDS: Dato' Indera Dr Nor Azimi Yunus officiates the event, flanked by Prof Dr Lim Soo Kun (left) and Dr T Thiruventhiran.

Early detection, better protection

- CKD highlights the need for comprehensive healthcare strategies to reduce risks
- Continuous professional development and collaboration are crucial to improve healthcare standards and patient outcomes.
- CKD prevalence in Malaysia has significantly increased, with diabetes and hypertension being the leading causes.



Vantive launches in Malaysia

VANTIVE, the newly established standalone company formerly known as Baxter's Kidney Care division, has launched its operations in Malaysia, marking a significant milestone in kidney care innovation.

With a legacy spanning over 70 years, Vantive is committed to extending lives and expanding possibilities for patients through advanced dialysis solutions and vital organ therapy.

As a market leader in kidney care, Vantive collaborates with more than 50 peritoneal dialysis centres across public hospitals, including strategic partnerships with the Ministry of Health's (MoH) Nephrology Services and the Malaysian Society of Nephrology.

These collaborations aim to enhance patient-centred care, promote research, and advance education



in the field of nephrology.

During the launch, Vantive General Manager (Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Myanmar) Paul Uthaichalanond emphasised the company's dedication to digital innovation and patient empowerment.

"Our transition from Baxter's Kidney Care allows us to concentrate on creating advanced solutions for

kidney patients, enabling them to choose therapies that best fit their needs, including home dialysis options," he said.

"We are also transforming our Shared Services Centre into a world-class Global Business Centre, which will significantly contribute to the Malaysian economy and workforce development."

BY SHEILA ROZARIO

THE public has long overlooked the importance of our kidneys and their functions. Despite chronic kidney disease (CKD) being a growing global crisis, there remains a worrying lack of awareness.

CKD is often called a "silent killer" because symptoms only appear in the later stages, making early detection and prevention crucial.

In response to this urgent health challenge, the National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia (NKF), in collaboration with the Malaysian Society of Nephrology (MSN), hosted a unique forum titled, 'Living Well with Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD): Empowering Knowledge & Community Support'.

The event on Feb 23, in conjunction with the global observance of World Kidney Day (WKD) on Mar 13, witnessed the participation of over 500 individuals, including healthcare professionals, patients, caregivers, and members of the public.

The occasion was officiated by the Deputy Director-General of Health Dato' Dr Nor Azimi Yunus, thereby reinforcing the commitment of the Ministry of Health

Malaysia (MoH) to promote awareness regarding kidney health and the prevention of chronic kidney disease (CKD).

EARLY DETECTION AND PREVENTION

Themed "Are Your Kidneys OK? Detect Early, Protect Kidney Health", this year's WKD campaign highlighted the significance of timely screening, lifestyle changes, and comprehensive healthcare strategies. Two key forums during the event provided invaluable insights into the realities of CKD and ways to combat its rise.

The first forum, 'Navigating a New Normal: Stories of Hope and Resilience from Kidney Patients and Carers', featured deeply personal narratives from individuals living with CKD and their caregivers.

These real-life stories shed light on the emotional, financial, and physical challenges of managing the disease while demonstrating the power of resilience and support networks.

Meanwhile, the second forum, 'Detecting and Preventing CKD: From the Lens of a General Practitioner and Family Medicine Specialist (FMS)', brought together medical experts to discuss the importance of early screening, dietary and lifestyle interventions, and multidisciplinary approaches in reducing CKD risks.

Panellists stressed the need for better education on CKD among both the medical fraternity and the general public to facilitate earlier diagnoses and improved patient outcomes.

A UNIFIED FRONT

"NKF remains committed to supporting the vision and policies of the MoH in strengthening the nation's healthcare system," said NKF Vice-Chairman Dr T Thiruventhiran.

"Addressing kidney disease requires a multi-sectoral approach, fostering collaboration between the government, NGOs, the private sector, and the public."

He emphasised that continuous professional development initiatives, such as the WKD forum, play a critical role in equipping

The launch coincided with World Kidney Day and addressed the urgent need for enhanced dialysis services in Malaysia. According to the Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy, chronic kidney disease (CKD) currently impacts over five million Malaysians, with more than 10,000 new dialysis patients diagnosed each year.

The MoH has responded by prioritising the Peritoneal Dialysis (Home Dialysis) First Policy, which aims to expand access to home-based treatment and improve management of end-stage kidney disease.

Deputy Minister of Health Dato Lukanisman Awang Sauni highlighted the importance of collaboration among government entities, healthcare providers, and industry partners in combating rising kidney disease prevalence.

Strong Partnerships Collaborating with industry leaders and healthcare professionals to improve treatment options for kidney patients nationwide.



NAVIGATING A NEW NORMAL: Stories of hope and resilience from kidney patients and carers: A powerful panel discussion featuring individuals who have lived through the challenges of kidney disease, including dialysis patients, transplant recipients, and caregivers. Moderated by Dr Tan Li Ping, the session provided a platform for Meldy Koay Seow Hong, Siva Kumar Raghavan, Muhamad Ridwan Jahidin, and Roslini Che Min to share their journeys, highlighting resilience, hope, and the importance of support networks in overcoming CKD-related challenges.

healthcare providers with the knowledge and tools necessary to raise medical standards and improve patient care in Malaysia.

Prof Dr Lim Soo Kun, president of the Malaysian Society of Nephrology (MSN), echoed similar sentiments, highlighting the pressing need for early intervention in the fight against CKD.

“Chronic Kidney Disease is rising at an alarming rate, and awareness is key to prevention. As nephrologists, we see firsthand how simple lifestyle changes and early intervention can slow the disease’s progression.”

TAKING CHARGE

Dr Lim outlined key steps every individual should take to safeguard kidney health:

- **Routine health screenings** - Regular urine and blood tests can detect CKD at its earliest, most treatable stages.
- **Adopting a kidney-friendly diet** - Reducing sodium and processed foods helps lower the risk of kidney damage.
- **Staying hydrated and physically active** - Regular exercise and adequate hydration support overall kidney function.
- **Managing diabetes and hypertension** - Controlling these two primary causes of CKD can significantly reduce kidney disease risks.

“Every individual must take charge of their kidney health. Small, consistent actions today can prevent serious complications in the future,” he added.

EXPANDING AWARENESS

While the WKD forum represented a significant advancement in raising awareness, the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) and the Medical Society of Nephrology (MSN) are sustaining their advocacy initiatives to guarantee that kidney health continues to be a national priority.

MSN has organised 35 ‘Combat Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)’ roadshows across the nation, targeting healthcare professionals and providing expert discussions and comprehensive insights into managing CKD.

In the upcoming months, NKF will also launch podcasts and establish collaborations with prominent radio stations to enhance the dissemination of essential

messages concerning kidney health.

Another key initiative is VoKAL (Voice-out Kidney Alliance), a national support group aimed at uniting and empowering patients. By fostering a strong and informed community, VoKAL strives to drive meaningful change in awareness promotion, patient advocacy, and healthcare policy influence.

TAKE ACTION

The observance of World Kidney Day 2025 in Malaysia marks the start of an ongoing movement to equip individuals with the knowledge to take proactive steps in safeguarding their kidney health. NKF urges Malaysians to undergo regular screenings, adopt healthier habits, and seek medical advice early to prevent CKD from becoming a silent threat.

With CKD cases on the rise, initiatives like these serve as critical touchpoints in empowering the public to take ownership of their kidney health. Through continued collaboration and education, Malaysia moves one step closer to reducing the burden of kidney disease and ensuring better health outcomes for future generations, ultimately helping to prevent CKD from becoming a silent threat. - **The HEALTH**



DETECTION AND PREVENTION: From the lens of a general practitioner and Family Medicine Specialist (FMS) - A vital discussion featuring leading healthcare professionals on the role of early detection and primary care in combating Chronic Kidney Disease. Moderated by Assoc. Prof Dr Ruslinda Mustafar, the panel included Dr Shanmuganathan Ganesan, Dr Wong Ping Foo, Dr Norlen Mohamed, and Dr Loh Chek Loong, who emphasised the importance of preventive strategies, patient education, and multidisciplinary collaboration in reducing the burden of kidney disease in Malaysia.

A national priority

MALAYSIA’S national observance of World Kidney Day 2025 highlighted the critical need for early detection and prevention of Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD).

In her keynote address, Deputy Director-General of Health (Medical) Dato’ Paduka Dr Nor Azimi Yunus emphasised the rising burden of CKD and the urgent need for proactive healthcare interventions.

“Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is a major global public health issue and has emerged as one of the leading causes of death, affecting more than 800 million individuals worldwide,” she stated.

RISING PREVALENCE

The prevalence of CKD in Malaysia has seen a significant rise over the years.

“The Malaysian National Health and Morbidity Survey 2011 showed that the prevalence of CKD among adults was 9.07 per cent, and only 4 per cent of respondents were aware of their diagnosis. Another study in 2018 revealed that the prevalence of CKD in Malaysia had increased to 15.48 per cent over seven years.”

THE LEADING CAUSES

She further noted that diabetes and hypertension remain the leading causes of kidney failure.

“Diabetes mellitus (DM) and hypertension (HPT) remain the leading causes of end-stage kidney disease (ESKD) in Malaysia. In 2023, the incidence of dialysis patients due to DM and HPT was 56 per cent and 30.1 per cent, respectively.”

The financial burden of CKD on Malaysia’s healthcare system is substantial. “Healthcare costs and resource utilisation associated with CKD and declining kidney function are a significant burden on the healthcare system and payers, and this burden increases as CKD progresses,” she warned.

She emphasised the importance of early screening and intervention, stating: “Early detection of CKD, particularly urine albuminuria/proteinuria screening, combined with proactive disease management, can improve patient care quality and significantly reduce healthcare costs.”

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT

Dr Nor Azimi reaffirmed the government’s commitment to improving kidney care accessibility.

“The MoH firmly believes that all efforts to bridge the knowledge gap and improve access to treatment among communities, patients, healthcare practitioners, and policymakers must be enhanced.”

She called for a multi-sectoral approach to combat CKD, emphasising that “the fight against kidney disease, especially diabetes and other non-communicable diseases, requires a sustainable approach that spans all sectors, including the government, private sector, industries, and the Malaysian public.”

Pioneering future healthcare

- The SEA Healthcare and Pharma Conference 2025 is set to launch in Kuala Lumpur.
- Featuring a prestigious steering committee and speakers addressing crucial healthcare topics.
- SEACare 2025 commits a portion of proceeds to cancer care and awareness.

Guest of Honour
Yang Berhormat
Ministry of Health,
**Datuk Seri Haji
Dr. Dzulkefly
Ahmad**

SEA Healthcare and Pharma Conference 2025
in conjunction with the 25th Southeast Asian Healthcare and Pharma Show 2025

23 - 25 April 2025 | MITEC, Kuala Lumpur

Organised by National Cancer Society Malaysia
Powered by Five Pillar Venture Capital

A 3-day conference bringing together thought leaders in Health System Transformation, Digital Health and Health Financing

HRD CLAIMABLE

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More than 20 leading local and international speakers

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Corporate Sustainability Partner: **National Cancer Society Malaysia**, **SEACare**
Conference Partner: **IMU**
Supported by: **GHA**, **IMU**, **Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation**, **Meet in Malaysia**, **P RANTIM**, **malaysia**
Official Airline Partner: **malaysia**

IN AN ambitious stride towards revolutionising the healthcare landscape in Southeast Asia, Qube Integrated Malaysia Sdn Bhd announced the SEA Healthcare and Pharma Conference 2025.

As Malaysia continues to evolve its healthcare landscape, focusing on digital integration, sustainable funding, and policy reforms, the conference aims to stimulate impactful discussions and forge strategic collaborations in the sector.

With the Health Transformation Office (HTO) implementing pivotal initiatives stemming from the Health White Paper, the event will spotlight how advancements in artificial intelligence are revolutionising patient care at the intersection of technology, policy, and investment.

CURATED CONFERENCE

The SEA Healthcare and Pharma Conference 2025 boasts guidance from a prestigious Steering Committee featuring prominent figures in the healthcare sector. Key members include:

- National Cancer Society Malaysia (NCSM) President & Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) Malaysia Co-chairperson Dato' Dr Saunthari Somasundaram
- Medical Device Authority (MDA) Chief Executive Officer Dr Muralitharan Paramasua
- Ministry of Health Malaysia's (MoH) Disease Control Division Deputy Director (NCD) Dr Noraryana Hassan
- Monash University Malaysia's Jeffrey Cheah School of Medicine

and Health Sciences Professor (Public Health and Policy) Eli Renganathan

- Frost & Sullivan Malaysia's Business Development Director Zainul Alam Abdul Kadir

Their diverse expertise in medical research, clinical practice, public health policy, and industry leadership ensures that the conference agenda remains insightful and forward-thinking.

Delegates attending all three days of the conference will receive a certificate of attendance and be eligible for 20 Continuous Professional Development (CPD) points each from the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) and the Malaysian Pharmacists Society (MPS).

Dr Noraryana remarked: "This conference stands out for its comprehensive approach, covering the entire disease continuum with case studies in areas like diabetes and cancer while focusing on core health system pillars such as financing and system strengthening.

"By bridging clinical practice with policy discussions, it offers valuable insights for a diverse range of stakeholders who can apply these learnings within their contexts across the region."

TACKLING KEY ISSUES

The conference will feature a thorough programme addressing essential topics, including:

- **Healthcare Transformation:** Investigating innovative healthcare delivery models, policy shifts, and strategies to bolster health systems.

- **Healthcare Financing and Policy:** Delving into sustainable financing strategies, universal healthcare coverage, public-private partnerships, and value-based care delivery.

- **Digital Health and AI Integration:** Showcasing advancements in AI, digital health solutions, cloud computing, and their implications for patient care and accessibility.

Among the distinguished speakers are KPJ Healthcare Bhd Regional Chief Executive Officer Hoo Ling Lee; MoH's Health Transformation Office (HTO) Chief Executive Officer Dr Yap Wei Aun; and MoH's Digital Health Director Dr Mahesh Appannan.

SEA Healthcare and Pharma Conference 2025 Organising Chairman and NCSM Managing Director Associate Professor Dr M Murallitharan stated: "The conference is designed to address the most pressing developments in healthcare.

"By exploring advancements in digital health, AI-driven innovations, and sustainable financing strategies, the event will catalyse transformative change in the regional healthcare landscape."

SOCIAL IMPACT & BUSINESS INNOVATION

SEACare 2025 is redefining healthcare trade events by blending commercial interests with social impact and innovation.

For the first time, a portion of the proceeds will support cancer care and awareness, thereby reinforcing the event's commitment to promoting healthcare progress beyond

mere business interests.

Qube Executive Chairman Richard Teo commented: "The SEA Healthcare and Pharma Conference 2025 marks a significant milestone as SEACare's first-ever conference, designed to foster critical dialogue, collaboration, and innovation.

"This conference reflects SEACare's evolution not just as a platform for business opportunities but as a driver of transformative ideas that will shape the future of healthcare in the region."

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

All passes grant full access to the conference with the following fee structure:

- **HRD Claimable & Local/Self-Paid Delegate Pass (3 days):** RM 3,900
- **Single-Day Pass:** RM 1,300 per day (for the three days)
- **International Delegate Pass (3 days):** USD 1,000 (approximately RM 4,500)

This landmark event, co-organised with the NCSM and Five Pillar Venture Capital Sdn Bhd, is set to unfold on Apr 23-25 at MITEC, Kuala Lumpur, running parallel to the SEACare 2025 exhibition.

This conference marks a significant advancement for SEACare, which Qube integrated into its operations in 2024.

The SEA Healthcare and Pharma Conference 2025 represents an unmissable opportunity for healthcare professionals, investors, and policymakers to drive meaningful change within. - **The HEALTH**

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Silent modern epidemic

- Excessive social media use, binge-watching, and mindless scrolling weaken cognitive functions.
- Islam promoted a balanced, purposeful life through mindful consumption of information.
- Just as halal food nourishes the body, consuming knowledge-driven content nourishes the mind and soul.



BY AMAL
ELGHARRAWY



AND ANIS NAJIHA
AHMAD

International
Institute for Halal
Research and
Training (INHART),
International
Islamic University
Malaysia

TODAY'S world is bombarded with distractions - social media notifications, endless video reels, viral challenges, and mindless scrolling. While these activities seem harmless, they are slowly corroding our brains, leading to a phenomenon we can call brain corrosion.

Just like metal rusts when exposed to water and air for too long, our brains also degrade when exposed to meaningless content, digital overstimulation, and a lack of purposeful engagement.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE BRAIN

We live in a digital age where information is abundant, but wisdom feels increasingly scarce. It is hard to ignore how social media has become a central part of our lives - how we instinctively reach for our phones during moments of boredom or downtime.

Studies show that excessive social media use is rewiring our brains, shrinking our attention spans, and fuelling a culture of dopamine addiction. But what does this mean for our cognitive functions, emotional well-being, and daily habits?

1. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and Twitter train our brains to consume information in bite-sized pieces. Over time, this weakens our ability to focus on more profound, more meaningful content such as books, study, or introspection.
2. Our brain releases dopamine whenever we get a like, comment, or notification. This creates a cycle where we constantly seek instant gratification, making us impatient and restless.
3. Social media feeds are filled with unrealistic portrayals of life, success, and beauty. Constant exposure to these images leads to low self-esteem, anxiety, and dissatisfaction.
4. Instead of experiencing real-life joys, conversations, and relationships, people spend hours in a digital bubble, disconnecting from the world around them.

This results in a weakened mind, reduced cognitive function, and a feeling of emptiness despite being "connected" all the time.

“Studies show that excessive social media use is rewiring our brains, shrinking our attention spans, and fuelling a culture of dopamine addiction. But what does this mean for our cognitive functions, emotional well-being, and daily habits?”

DEATH OF DEEP THINKING

Beyond social media, other forms of digital entertainment, such as binge-watching shows, gaming for long hours, and excessive consumption of useless gossip, also contribute to brain corrosion.

The less we think deeply, the weaker our ability to solve problems, innovate, and reflect on life.

Moreover, excessive exposure to meaningless entertainment leads to intellectual laziness and reduces our capacity to engage in meaningful conversations.

We are losing the ability to sit in silence, reflect, and seek knowledge - all of which are essential for spiritual and personal growth (Shanmugasundaram and Tamilarasu, 2023).

In a world that's constantly vying for our attention, it's easy to lose sight of what truly matters. The question we must ask ourselves is this: are we trading our capacity for deep thinking and meaningful connection for the fleeting pleasures of digital distraction? And if so, how do we reclaim what we've lost?

LIFESTYLE OF PURPOSE

Islam provides a structured, disciplined way of life that naturally combats

brain corrosion. The halal and toyyib way of living is not just about food - it extends to what we consume mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Islam encourages productivity, reflection, and balance, ensuring our minds remain strong and engaged in meaningful pursuits.

1. Protecting the mind with purposeful engagement

Ibn Abbas reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

“Take advantage of five before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your illness, your riches before your poverty, your free time before your work, and your life before your death” - [Shu'ab al-Imān lil-Bayhaqi 10250]

Islam teaches us to use our time wisely. Engaging in activities that bring knowledge, personal growth, and spiritual fulfilment prevents mental decay. Instead of mindless scrolling, we are encouraged to read and seek beneficial knowledge, engage in productive work and hobbies, spend time remembering Allah SWT (dhikr), and reflect on our purpose and goals.

2. Social media in moderation: The concept of balance

Islam does not prohibit enjoyment but promotes moderation. The Quran states:

“Do not follow what you have no 'sure' knowledge of. Indeed, all will be called to account for 'their' hearing, sight, and intellect” - [Quran, Al-Isra, 17:36].

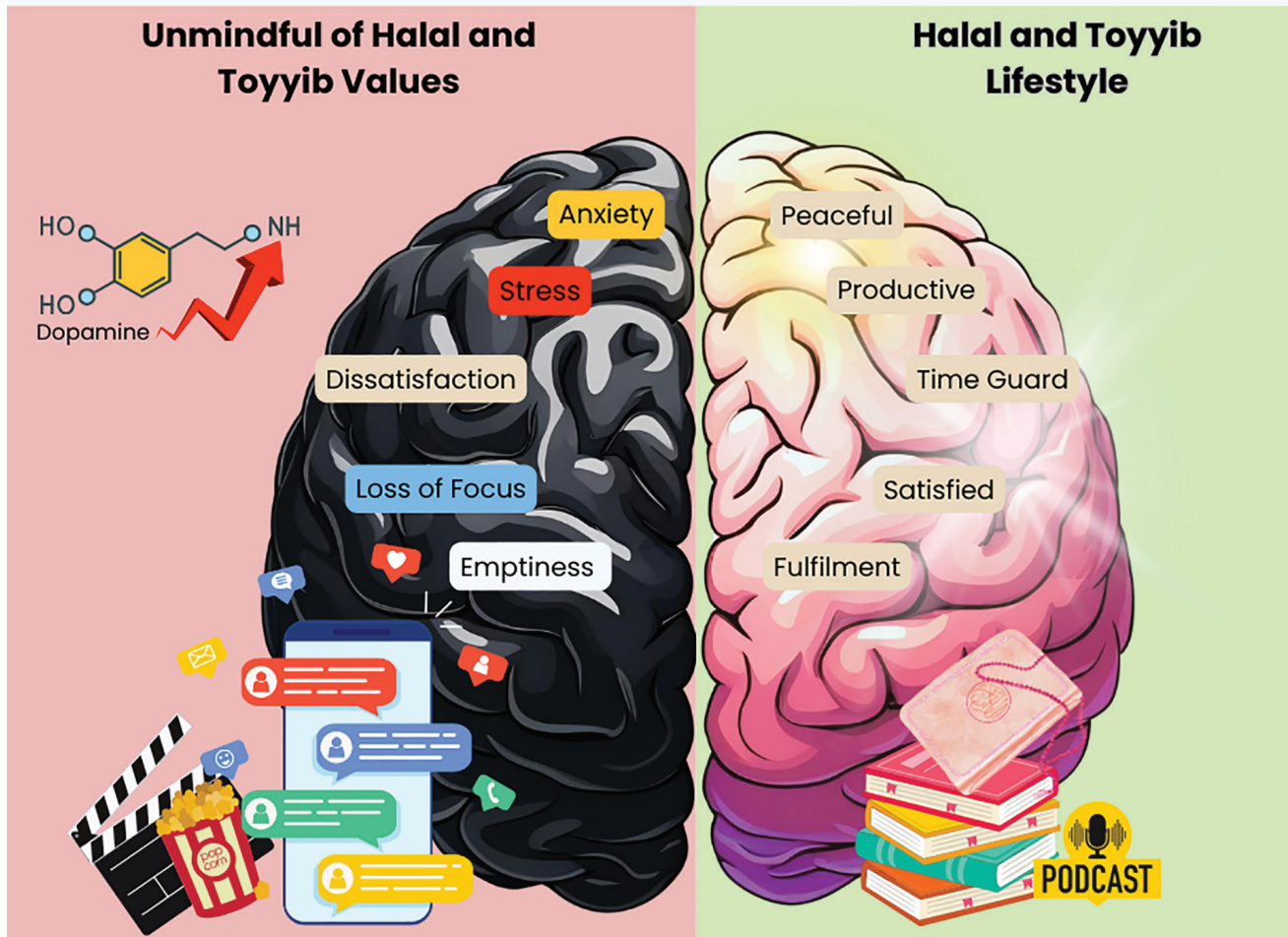
This verse emphasises the importance of mindful consumption of information, reminding us that we will be held accountable for spending our time - whether we invested it wisely or wasted it on trivial pursuits. Islam teaches that enjoyment and relaxation are permissible, but they must be balanced with meaningful pursuits and spiritual growth.

3. Seeking mental clarity through prayer and reflection

One of the most powerful tools to prevent brain corrosion is prayer. Regular prayer drives us to disconnect from the world's noise and reconnect with Allah SWT.

Brain Corrosion

Protect Your Mind



The physical actions of prayer, combined with deep concentration, act as a mental reset, similar to mindfulness and meditation. The Quran states:

“Those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of Allah. Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find comfort.” [Quran, Ar-Ra’d, 13:28]

Scientific research confirms that prayer and meditation reduce stress, improve focus, and enhance overall brain function. A few minutes of sincere dua’a (supplication) and reflection daily can restore mental clarity and prevent spiritual and intellectual rust (Callender, Ong & Othman, 2022).

4. The power of a Toyyib lifestyle: Eating and thinking clean
The concept of a Tayyib lifestyle extends far beyond what we put on our plates. It includes everything we consume - whether through our eyes, ears, or hearts.

As we are mindful of eating what is pure and beneficial, we should also seek out content that nourishes the soul rather than indulging in toxic, meaningless entertainment that corrodes the mind.

A toyyib life also encourages us to choose halal work, engage in ethical business practices, and cultivate pure,

meaningful relationships that add true value to our lives. A toyyib lifestyle fosters gratitude and mindfulness.

When we consciously choose purity in all aspects of life, we break free from the cycle of dissatisfaction and spiritual emptiness. Our minds stay sharp, our hearts remain light, and our actions carry lasting meaning.

PREVENTING BRAIN CORROSION

Combating mental fatigue and overstimulation starts with limiting screen time and reducing exposure to unproductive content. Regular digital breaks encourage real-life engagement and mental clarity.

Replacing passive scrolling with meaningful activities - such as reading, learning new skills, or listening to beneficial lectures and podcasts - keeps the mind active and sharp.

Daily prayer and dhikr provide organisation and reflection, helping to clear mental clutter and maintain focus.

Surrounding oneself with positive influences promotes discipline while avoiding environments filled with gossip and negativity, which preserves mental well-being.

Toyyib lifestyle further supports brain health through wholesome foods,

sufficient rest, and physical activity.

Minimising trivial distractions ensures time and energy are directed toward purposeful and beneficial pursuits, in line with Islamic principles of balance and mindfulness.

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

Brain corrosion is real! The mind is a trust, and preserving its health is a responsibility. In an era dominated by distractions, the need for conscious, intentional living has never been greater.

A life rooted in meaningful action, reflection, and balance enhances cognitive strength and nurtures spiritual and emotional well-being.

Islamic teachings offer a comprehensive guide to cultivating this purposeful existence.

They encourage halal and toyyib living, which cuts across the wise use of time, the pursuit of beneficial knowledge, and engagement in actions that bring lasting value.

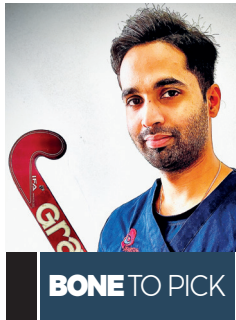
Embracing these principles creates space for clarity, focus, and peace in a world that often pulls in the opposite direction.

Before the next mindless scroll, pause and ask: is this moment an investment in the mind - or a withdrawal from it? - **THE HEALTH**

“As we are mindful of eating what is pure and beneficial, we should also seek out content that nourishes the soul rather than indulging in toxic, meaningless entertainment that corrodes the mind.”

There's a disc in my knee?

- Unlike typical menisci, which are C-shaped, a discoid meniscus is thicker and more disc-like.
- If symptoms like pain, clicking, or knee instability occur, medical attention may be needed.
- In severe cases where there is pain, locking, or a tear, arthroscopic surgery can help reshape or trim the meniscus to restore normal knee function.



BONE TO PICK



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



THERE'S often a pause, followed by confusion and a hint of horror when patients hear me describe that there is a disc-like structure in their knee.

So, let's clear this up. If you've ever heard of a "discoid meniscus", you might be wondering what it is and how it affects the knee. While this condition isn't prevalent, it can cause discomfort and mobility issues for those who have it.

In this article, we'll break down what a discoid meniscus is, why it happens, its symptoms, and how it can be treated.

WHAT IS A MENISCUS?

To understand a discoid meniscus, we first need to know what a meniscus is. In my previous article entitled "Cushioning the blow", I talked about the functions of the meniscus and common injuries to it.

Let's recap real quick. The menisci (plural for meniscus), act as shock absorbers between the thigh bone (femur) and shin bone (tibia). These menisci help stabilize the knee and prevent excessive wear on the bones.

Typically, the meniscus has a C-shape and provides cushioning during movements like walking, running, and jumping. However, in some people, the meniscus forms differently - becoming thicker, rounder, and more like a disk rather than the usual crescent shape.

This is what we call a discoid meniscus.

WHAT CAUSES A DISCOID MENISCUS?

A discoid meniscus is something a person is born with - it is a congenital

condition. Researchers aren't entirely sure why it happens, but it develops while a baby is growing in the womb. Unlike some knee problems that come from injuries or wear and tear, a discoid meniscus is present from birth.

This condition most commonly affects the lateral meniscus, which is located on the outer side of the knee. However, it can also occur in the inner meniscus (medial meniscus), though that's much rarer.

SYMPTOMS OF A DISCOID MENISCUS

Many people with a discoid meniscus never experience any symptoms and may go their whole lives without realizing they have it. However, for others, symptoms can start in childhood or early adulthood, especially if the meniscus becomes damaged or torn.

Common symptoms include:

- Clicking or popping sounds when moving the knee.
- Pain or discomfort, especially after activity.
- Swelling around the knee
- A feeling of instability or weakness in the knee.
- Locking or catching, where the knee temporarily gets stuck when trying to move it.

The clicking and popping sounds happen because the thickened meniscus doesn't fit into the knee joint properly. If the meniscus tears, the symptoms may worsen, leading to more pain and trouble moving the knee.

HOW IS A DISCOID MENISCUS DIAGNOSED?

If someone has symptoms like clicking,

pain, or instability in their knee, a doctor will first perform a physical examination. They may bend and move the knee to check for unusual movements or sounds.

Imaging tests such as an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) are commonly used to confirm the diagnosis. An MRI provides a detailed view of the knee's cartilage, showing if the meniscus is thicker than usual or if there is a tear.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

The treatment for a discoid meniscus depends on whether it is causing problems:

- 1. If there are no symptoms:** If a discoid meniscus is discovered by accident (such as during an MRI for another issue) but isn't causing pain or instability, no treatment is necessary. Many people live with a discoid meniscus without any problems.
- 2. Surgery (for severe cases):** If the discoid meniscus is causing significant pain, locking, or tearing, surgery may be needed. The most common procedure is arthroscopic surgery, which is a minimally invasive technique where small instruments are used to trim or reshape the meniscus.

After surgery, physical therapy is often recommended to restore knee strength and mobility.

For those who have a discoid meniscus without symptoms, there's no need to worry - it may never cause problems. But for those who do experience pain or instability, treatment options can help restore knee function and allow them to return to normal activities.

- **The HEALTH**

Fries, but at what cost?

- High-fat diets can rapidly harm brain function.
- Age increases vulnerability to diet-induced cognitive decline.
- Dietary choices directly impact brain health.

RECENT research has demonstrated that even short-term consumption of a high-fat diet can lead to cognitive impairments and brain inflammation in older individuals, independent of obesity.

In a study using rodent models, researchers observed that aged rats fed a diet consisting of 60 per cent of calories from fat exhibited significant memory decline. In contrast, younger rats on the same diet did not experience such deficits.

While metabolic and gut health alterations required extended periods to manifest, memory impairments emerged rapidly in older animals. These findings suggest that diet-induced brain inflammation is not solely a consequence of obesity but can quickly occur following the intake of unhealthy foods.

The study compared groups of young and aged rats that were placed on a high-fat diet for either three days or three months to assess the timeline of changes in the brain relative to other physiological systems.

Notably, just three days of a high-fat diet was sufficient to induce cognitive impairment in older rats, preceding any observable metabolic or gut microbiome changes.

In contrast, prolonged consumption of fatty foods over three months led to broader systemic effects, including metabolic dysfunction, gut inflammation, and shifts in microbiota composition across all animals.

However, when examining the brain, researchers found that only aged rats - regardless of whether they were on the high-fat diet for three days or three months - exhibited memory deficits and neuroinflammatory changes.

This challenges the conventional notion that obesity is the primary driver of diet-related neuroinflammation. The study highlights that detrimental effects on the ageing brain can arise from dietary factors independently of obesity.

ONSET OF OBESITY

Unhealthy dietary habits and obesity are frequently correlated, yet they are distinct processes. This research underscores the direct impact of dietary composition on brain function, revealing that significant neuroinflammatory changes occur within days - far earlier



than the onset of obesity.

The study further demonstrates that systemic metabolic changes are not prerequisites for diet-induced cognitive impairments, emphasising the brain's heightened sensitivity to dietary insults.

These findings align with existing research suggesting that ageing primes the brain's inflammatory responses while reducing its capacity for recovery. The study also reinforces that an unhealthy diet exacerbates age-related cognitive decline.

The high-fat diet used in the experiment mirrors the nutritional composition of many fast-food items, drawing parallels between laboratory findings and common dietary patterns in human populations.

To assess cognitive function, researchers conducted behavioural tests evaluating hippocampus-dependent contextual memory and amygdala-mediated cued-fear memory - two domains often affected in neurodegenerative conditions.

Aged rats consuming a high-fat diet for as little as three days exhibited impairments in both memory domains, which persisted throughout the three-month dietary intervention.

Further analysis revealed disruptions in cytokine levels - key regulators of inflammation - within the brains of aged rats following short-term exposure to a high-fat diet. This dysregulated inflammatory response persisted even after prolonged dietary exposure, coinciding with sustained memory impairments.

BEHAVIOURAL IMPAIRMENTS

A departure from baseline inflammatory markers has been previously linked to learning and memory deficits, further supporting the hypothesis that diet-induced neuroinflammation contributes

to cognitive decline in ageing.

Compared to control groups on a standard diet, both young and aged rats exposed to high-fat diets for three months exhibited weight gain and signs of metabolic dysfunction, including impaired insulin signalling, increased inflammatory markers in adipose tissue, and alterations in gut microbiota.

However, young rats did not display cognitive or behavioural impairments, suggesting a greater capacity for anti-inflammatory compensatory responses, which appears to be diminished in aged animals.

The study's findings suggest that while obesity-related changes affect both young and aged individuals, older populations may be particularly vulnerable to the cognitive consequences of high-fat diets due to their impaired ability to counteract inflammatory responses.

Importantly, distinguishing between metabolic and neurological changes is crucial to understanding the mechanisms underlying diet-induced memory impairment.

The research underscores the need to consider dietary effects on brain health independently of obesity, providing new insights into dietary risk factors for age-related cognitive decline.

CONCLUSION

Next time you're about to sink your teeth into a double cheeseburger with extra fries, consider this: "Fast Food, Fast Forgetting" might be more than just a catchy phrase.

This study suggests that indulging in a high-fat diet - even for just a few days - can leave your brain feeling like yesterday's cold fries. "Butter Makes It Better...Except for Your Brain" is a warning, not a slogan. Think of it this way: That "Memory Loss: Now Served With Extra Cheese" special might come free with your order, and your brain could end up as "Deep-Fried Brain: The Side Effect of a High-Fat Diet." Forgetfulness isn't just for misplaced car keys anymore - "Dude, Where's My Memory?" might be your new daily struggle.

So before you let a "Burger Brain" take over, maybe swap that fast-food fix for something that won't leave you "Lost in the Sauce". Because when it comes to high-fat diets, it's "High-Fat, Low Recall" - and that's a deal nobody wants. - **The HEALTH**



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).

Mindfulness helps the brain

- Scientific studies show that mindfulness can reduce the size of the amygdala and increase grey matter.
- Mindfulness lowers cortisol levels, helping to reduce stress and anxiety.
- Techniques like mindful breathing, meditation and body scan exercises help rewire the brain.



BRAIN NOTES

BY TONY PEREIRA

Tony Pereira is an Independent Consultant and Founder of SuperTrouper365

MELISSA Hogenboom is a science journalist with the BBC. Some years ago, she agreed to a simple test to determine if the brain can be rewired through mindfulness exercises. She went to the Royal Holloway Hospital and had her brain scanned.

She then undertook a six-week guided meditation course with the help of Thorsten Barnhofer, a professor of clinical psychology at the University of Surrey in the UK.

The session involved a single 30-minute session or two 15-minute sessions daily. After six weeks, Hogenboom had another brain scan to determine if there was any change in the brain. She says the results were amazing.

One-half of her amygdala had reduced in size. The larger the amygdala, the more prone we are to stress and anxiety.

Another noticeable change was to her cingulate cortex. This is part of the limbic system and is involved in our behavioural and emotional responses.

Thirdly, the default mode network, a region that becomes active when the mind wanders and ruminates, slightly increased in size over the six weeks, indicating increased control of that region.

She says in her article: "It also resonates with what I had noticed during my sessions. Over time, I found I was able to keep my mind more restful - I was better able to zone out busy thoughts."

UNDERSTANDING MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the practice of focusing attention on the present moment with a non-judgmental awareness of thoughts, feelings, and surroundings. It involves deliberate attention to experiences as they unfold, fostering a state of calm, clarity, and acceptance.

Mindfulness can be cultivated through meditation, breathing exercises, and mindful living, which includes activities such as mindful eating and walking.

Neuroscientists have for some time now carried out research on the impact of mindfulness on the brain. Beyond what Hogenboom shared about her experience with mindfulness, here are some other benefits of regular mindfulness exercises.

RESHAPING THE BRAIN

1. Strengthening the prefrontal cortex: The prefrontal cortex, responsible for decision-making, problem-solving, and self-control, plays a crucial role in cognitive function. Studies using MRI

scans have shown that mindfulness meditation increases grey matter density in the prefrontal cortex. This enhancement leads to improved focus, better impulse control, and more effective decision-making.

- 2. Enhancing connectivity between brain regions:** Mindfulness fosters better connectivity between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex, improving the brain's ability to regulate emotions. This connectivity allows for a more measured response to stress and anxiety rather than immediate, reflexive reactions. A well-connected brain enhances self-awareness, resilience, and cognitive flexibility.
- 3. Increasing grey matter in the hippocampus:** The hippocampus, essential for memory and learning, benefits significantly from mindfulness practices. Scientific research has found that individuals who engage in regular mindfulness meditation exhibit increased grey matter volume in the hippocampus. This increase enhances memory retention, learning capacity, and overall cognitive function.

PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS

- 1. Reducing Stress and Anxiety:** Mindfulness decreases the production of cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone. By reducing cortisol levels, mindfulness lowers stress and anxiety, creating a calmer mental state. Additionally, mindfulness teaches individuals to observe their thoughts without getting overwhelmed, promoting emotional balance.
- 2. Enhancing Emotional Regulation:** By improving connections between the prefrontal cortex and amygdala, mindfulness helps individuals manage emotions more effectively. This capability reduces impulsive reactions and fosters a greater sense of control over thoughts and feelings. As a result, people practising mindfulness tend to exhibit lower levels of anger, frustration, and emotional distress.
- 3. Improving Focus and Attention:** With constant distractions from digital devices and task-switching demands, maintaining focus has become challenging. Mindfulness training strengthens attentional control, allowing individuals to concentrate better and filter out distractions. Studies have found that even brief mindfulness training enhances sustained attention and

working memory.

- 4. Boosting Mental Resilience:** Mindfulness cultivates resilience by changing the brain's response to adversity. It enables individuals to develop a non-reactive awareness of difficult situations, reducing the impact of negative experiences. This resilience protects against mental health disorders such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

VISUALISING THE IMPACT

A visual representation of the brain regions that benefit from mindfulness can help illustrate its profound impact:

- Prefrontal Cortex (Improved decision-making and impulse control)
- Amygdala (Reduced stress and emotional reactivity)
- Hippocampus (Enhanced memory and learning)
- Anterior Cingulate Cortex (Improved emotional regulation and focus)
- Insula (Increased self-awareness and empathy)

INCORPORATING MINDFULNESS

1. Mindful Breathing

A simple yet effective mindfulness technique involves focusing on the breath. Taking slow, deep breaths while observing inhalations and exhalations can anchor attention to the present moment and reduce stress. A common way of mindful breathing is the 4-7-8 method. Here, we inhale for four counts, hold for seven counts and exhale for eight counts. This cycle can be repeated four or five times. It activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps us relax.

2. Mindful Meditation

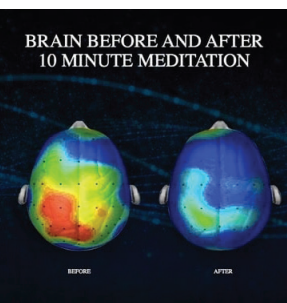
Practising meditation for even 10-15 minutes daily can rewire the brain for improved emotional regulation and cognitive function. Meditation involves sitting quietly, focusing on the breath, and bringing attention back when it wanders.

3. Body Scan Meditation

This practice involves paying close attention to bodily sensations, starting from the head and moving down to the toes. It promotes relaxation, increases body awareness, and alleviates physical tension.

CONCLUSION

We take brain health for granted. Our bodies would, however, benefit from a program that keeps them healthy. The question to ask ourselves is simply this: "How much time are we willing to invest daily to keep the mind healthy?" - **THE HEALTH**



STATE OF THE BRAIN: The more blue the brain, the less stress we feel.

Quo vadis, Malaysia?

- The sharp increase in private healthcare insurance premiums makes it difficult for many in the M40 group.
- Despite rising costs for consumers, major private healthcare and insurance companies continue to report substantial profits.
- The government has announced measures like adjusting premiums, postponing hikes, and developing more affordable premiums



DIFFERENT STROKES

BY ADI SATRIA

A veteran of the media industry, recognises that being part of the ageing population, the already inflationary cost of living should not burden the challenges posed by our people in meeting health challenges, and a better deal must be provided, not just to patients but to doctors and health care workers alike.

A RECENT announcement on the increase in healthcare premiums by insurance companies for private healthcare hospitals has sent the public into open debates.

The bottom line was the affordability of those within the M40 group who may not be able to afford the premiums. This will result in this large group switching to public hospitals, which will contribute to the already stressful level of service and the pressure among doctors and other healthcare staff.

A recent personal experience can aptly illustrate the situation on the ground. My other half had an unfortunate fall at home, which fractured her left hip joint, and she was admitted to the Ampang Hospital.

As she was not in critical condition, she was placed in the “Yellow Zone” of the emergency ward for two days as the regular wards were facing a shortage of beds. Minimum care was administered, which contributed to her already traumatic mental state.

Once in the regular ward, the relevant doctors efficiently administered the proper procedures to prepare her for the surgery on the following Tuesday, precisely seven days after her fall.

FULL RECOVERY

The head of the surgery reassured us of the procedures. At the same time, other medical officers, including a psychiatrist who diagnosed her state of mind, felt she was ready to undergo the operation.

As her blood pressure was satisfactory and her sugar level was good, the operation was successful. She was discharged three days later, but the wound took only one week to heal. Full recovery will take a few months before she will be able to walk correctly.

I arranged for a private physiotherapist to come over to the house to work on her legs and thigh muscles, and walking was the only way to achieve this. Now, compare her experience with that of a friend of mine, an 80-year-old foreign man who suffered the same fate but was treated in a private hospital in Subang Jaya.

His operation was almost immediately, and upon discharge, he went to a nursing home to recuperate. Although he had diabetes, he insisted on taking food that

was high in sugar, which resulted in his sugar spiking and his wounds worsening and becoming infected.

He was then sent back to the hospital for treatment, but after a few days, the infection became so bad that an operation was needed to replace the metal joint. The initial operation cost him an astounding RM50,000, and this new operation will cost him another RM30,000!

As he had run out of savings, we advised him to discharge himself and go to a government hospital in Shah Alam. As expected, it was also congested, and he was later transferred to the Klang Hospital. This whole process took 10 days of waiting.

However, the good news for him was that the cost of the operations was only around RM4,000, much more than what my wife paid for as she was a senior citizen. With the plans to increase healthcare insurance premiums, there are concerns that many M40 households will consider not taking any health insurance or stopping their contributions, which will then put heavier pressure on public hospitals.

Many in the M40 group prefer health insurance coverage for private health care as it is considered more convenient, though not necessarily better, compared to public hospitals.

In fact, based on my own experience, being treated at government hospitals was quite satisfactory. The healthcare professionals were excellent, and I really salute and empathise with them on the challenges they face in providing the best for the patients. The rise in medical insurance premiums is expected to be between 40 to 70 per cent.

HISTORIC PROFITS

The insurance providers blame it on the rising costs of medical care in private hospitals. However, a closer look at the facts in the financial reports of the major players in the private healthcare and insurance industries shows a different scenario. IHH Healthcare announced a nett profit of RM534 million for Q3, 2024 while KPJ Healthcare hit a historic RM1 billion quarterly revenue milestone in the same quarterly period.

Healthcare insurance provider Allianz Malaysia recorded a rise in revenue to RM1.37 billion and a nett profit of RM167 million just for Q2 2024. Prudential Assurance reported RM963.47 million for its

financial year ending 2023.

Don't these facts suggest a thriving private healthcare industry? One wonders why the public must contribute more unfairly to the success of these industry players. In response to all this, the government announced in mid-March 2025 several measures to address the rising cost of health insurance and tafakul premiums, including adjusting premium rates and introducing more affordable options.

Four key steps to ease the financial burden on policyholders are the distribution of premium adjustment rates, postponing premium increases, reactivating specific policies and offering alternative products. The government will also expedite the reform of the national health sector over these three years, from 2024 to 2026.

MEDICAL TOURISM

At the same time, Bank Negara Malaysia, together with the Health Ministry and Employees Provident Fund, will also take steps to develop essential health insurance and takaful products that emphasise a value-based healthcare approach.

We need to see how these steps play out. Malaysia is also a very attractive medical tourism destination in the region, and it has attracted over a million health tourists in 2023 alone. Revenue generated was RM2.25 billion, with a further RM9.6 billion in spillover benefits to other industries.

Therefore, the consideration here is to relook at the rates imposed on our population because healthcare should be seen as a fundamental human right and an essential service to citizens and not for maximisation of profits.

The government has already launched the Flagship Medical Tourism Hospital Program (FMTH), an integral part of the Medical Healthcare Travel Industry Blueprint 2021-2025.

It aspires to establish Malaysia as a premier medical tourism destination. This programme provides several features, including tax incentives to selected flagship hospitals, and it must also ensure that our own local population is not charged the same relatively high rates imposed on these foreign patients.

Charity, after all, should begin at home.
- THE HEALTH



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