

# Anti-tobacco groups urge stronger vape crackdown

**PETALING JAYA:** The continued sale of unregulated vapes in physical stores and vape devices online reflects the urgent need for comprehensive enforcement, say anti-tobacco groups.

Malaysian Council for Tobacco Control president Prof Dr Murallitharan Munisamy said enough time has lapsed since the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024 (Act 852) was passed, calling for a tighter crackdown.

He added that excuses of clearing old stock and more are unacceptable as the Health Ministry has already given a long-landing

period on this matter.

"We need to crack down on unregulated vape sales.

"These issues will persist in the market even if there is a future ban, especially if we lack a comprehensive enforcement infrastructure and ecosystem," he said.

However, he noted that enforcement agencies cannot tackle this alone, citing how the rakyat can also take action by reporting non-compliance through the JomLapor portal.

JomLapor is a portal dedicated to enforcement advocacy under Act 852.

On the decline in online sales

over e-commerce platforms, he said this reflects stricter policing on the part of the Health and Communications ministries.

"However, the problem continues to persist on individual websites and private social media groups. We need a more comprehensive review in order to curb this," he said.

Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations' Tobacco Control coordinator Muhammad Sha'ani Abdullah welcomed the removal of vape products from major e-commerce platforms.

"It signals that large marketplace operators are beginning to

recognise their responsibility in preventing the sale and promotion of harmful products, especially those targeting or easily accessible to minors.

"However, this did not happen in a vacuum. It follows sustained public concern, enforcement pressure and increasing global regulatory scrutiny," he said.

Muhammad Sha'ani stressed the importance of clear measurable enforcement targets.

He said simple age-declaration pop-ups are meaningless, noting how anonymous or loosely verified digital commerce creates a fertile ground for illegal activity.

"All online sellers must be properly registered business entities under the Companies Act 2016 through the Companies Commission of Malaysia," he said.

According to anti-tobacco activist NV Subbarow, more sundry shops are beginning to sell the products without any concerns.

He also claimed that a store in George Town, Penang, is even giving complimentary vape juices to regular buyers if they introduce new "customers".

"There shouldn't be a time frame when introducing a ban. It should be all-encompassing and immediate," he said.

## Illegal vapes hidden in plain sight

### Sale of devices and liquids continues despite regulations

By GERARD GIMINO  
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**PETALING JAYA:** At a glance, the shelves don't look out of the ordinary. But ask the right question and the drawer slides open.

Despite the enforcement of the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024 (Act 852), unregulated vape devices and vape liquids with high nicotine content are still being sold at physical stores across the Klang Valley.

At several shops here, bottles of vape juice containing nicotine levels above the permitted 20mg/ml are sold openly.

"They come without the mandatory health warnings required under the law.

"If you want those with a stronger hit, you can go for these ones as they have higher nicotine content," said a seller.

Disposable vape devices exceeding the 3,000 puffs limit

have also been found to be sold openly from the start of the year.

This was apparent at stores that previously withheld the products.

"We just want to clear the old stock. Previously, we refrained from selling them and even kept them away to abide by the rules.

"But lately, we just began selling them again so that we can finish them off," said another seller here, who declined to be named.

At other stores here, the products are not openly displayed but will be shown if asked.

"If you want to get it, best to do it now as the stocks will not last for long.

"Demand has been high and we just want to get rid of it fast owing to enforcement checks," said a seller who produced the items upon request.

Other vape shops, meanwhile, are steadfast in not selling unregulated products.

"Other sellers can do what they



**Not hard to find:** Despite Act 852 coming into force, unregulated vape devices and liquids are still available for sale in physical and online stores. — MUHAMAD SHAHRIL ROSLI/The Star

want, but we won't. It's bad enough that the government is pushing for a ban, so we should all play by the rules," said a seller who wanted to be known only as Amin.

In the digital marketplace, the situation has eased slightly.

The products are no longer sold on major e-commerce sites but are still easily found through individual sites after a simple search.

At these sites, there are no age verification procedures needed to make a purchase apart from indicating if one is aged 18 and above at the website's landing page.

Payments can be made through either debit or credit cards as well as e-wallets.

This too, is a violation under Act 852, which requires sellers to obtain proof that an individual is aged 18 and above before selling the products.

Act 852 came into force on Oct 1, 2024, while its full implementation began on Oct 1, 2025, with the launch of Ops Selamat Paru-Paru (Ops Selamat PaPa), to further strengthen enforcement activities under the Act.

Phase one covers regulations including the prohibition of smoking products from being sold in educational institutions, online platforms, markets and vending machines.

The second phase of enforcement includes a display ban on

smoking products.

Phase three, meanwhile, regulates how smoking products are packaged.

Earlier this year, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said Malaysia is moving towards a total ban of vapes, beginning with open system devices.

An open system vape refers to a refillable device where users manually fill a cartridge with their own e-liquid.

He had said that the ban on these devices was "almost there", highlighting how the open system is prone to misuse, with synthetic drugs having found their way into the product.

# Healthcare giant targets RM2.9bil IPO

Expansion plans and strong performance expected to attract investor interest



## CORPORATE

By KEITH HIEW  
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**PETALING JAYA:** Sunway Healthcare Holdings Bhd (SHH) is confident the market will see value in the company's maximum initial public offering (IPO) price of RM1.45 per share, despite there being talk that the price is relatively elevated compared to industry peers.

SHH, scheduled to list on the Main Market of Bursa Malaysia on March 18, launched its prospectus last Friday, aiming to raise up to RM2.86bil through its IPO, which would give the healthcare arm of parent Sunway Bhd an

**“Our experience in ensuring our medical centres turn around to profitability puts us in good stead.”**

Datuk Lau Beng Long

approximate market capitalisation of RM16.68bil on 11.5 billion shares.

At the maximum IPO price, this would be the largest IPO in the country in nine years, beating out other well-known names such as 99 Speed Mart Retail Holdings Bhd and Farn Fresh Bhd.

According to SHH's listing pro-

spectus, the company generated a net profit of RM257.5mil for the financial year ended Dec 31, 2024 (FY24), which means its price-to-earnings (PE) ratio based on the IPO valuation would be roughly 64.8 times.

In comparison, the other two listed healthcare companies, IHH Healthcare Bhd and KPJ Healthcare Bhd, have estimated

PE ratios of approximately 35 times.

SHH president and executive director Datuk Lau Beng Long pointed out that the PE figure based on earnings results for FY24 would have been affected by the cost structure in setting up the two latest hospitals, namely Sunway Medical Centre Damansara (SMCD) and Sunway Medical Centre Ipoh (SMCI).

“Our experience in ensuring our medical centres turn around to profitability puts us in good stead.

“For example, SMCD has achieved a positive earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (Ebitda) within eight months and a positive pre-tax profit in 13 months.

“Likewise, SMCI is now Ebitda positive in nine months, so we look forward to even better numbers for FY25 and beyond,” he said.

As such, he said investors with a mid-term to long-term mindset would be attracted to the prospects of SHH despite its currently higher valuation.

Lau was speaking at a media briefing to launch the prospectus last Friday, which was also attended by Sunway founder and chairman Tan Sri Sir Dr Jeffrey Cheah.

The company appointed Maybank Investment Bank Bhd (Maybank IB) and AmInvestment Bank Bhd as joint principal advisers.

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# Sunway Healthcare plans nationwide expansion

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Explaining further on the reasons for SHH's IPO valuation, Maybank IB's managing director and regional head for equity capital markets Raymond Chooi said investors can take comfort in SHH's domestically focused clear earnings visibility.

"Expansion-wise, whether it is brownfield or greenfield, the group has also demonstrated a comprehensible pathway.

"While investors often need to decide between risk and rewards, in SHH's case, we would find defensive exposure with a coherent growth path, a profile that does not appear often in Malaysia," he said.

Notably, the IPO has secured 20 cornerstone investors subscribing for 855 million shares collectively, or 97.5% of the institutional offering.

These include AHAM Asset Management Bhd, AIA Bhd, Employees Provident Fund Board, International Finance Corp, JPMorgan Asset Management (Singapore) Ltd, and Kenanga Investors Bhd.

Targeting to raise roughly RM833.8mil via public issue, the company intends to utilise approximately RM554.1mil or 66.5% of the gross proceeds, to part finance the expansion of existing hospitals, in line with the strategy to strengthen market leadership and increase bed capacity.

Approximately RM249.7mil or 29.9% would be allocated towards the partial redemption of tranche two and full

redemption of tranche three of the *sukuk wakalah* issued by SHH in 2023 and 2024, respectively.

The proceeds from tranche two were used to finance the acquisition of Towers A and B of Sunway Medical Centre Sunway City Kuala Lumpur in 2023, while the proceeds from tranche three were utilised to fund the construction of brownfield projects, mainly SMCD, SMCI, Sunway Medical Centre Sunway City Kuala Lumpur (Towers D, E and F) and Sunway Medical Centre Penang.

The remaining RM30mil or 3.6% would be utilised to defray fees and expenses in relation to the IPO and the listing.

Meanwhile, Sunway chairman Cheah, also executive director and chairman for SHH, said the company would be focusing on expanding its footprint throughout the country, including Sabah and Sarawak.

He did not discount the possibility of overseas expansion but added that the company would be "cautious" and would not be pressured into timelines given its strong local foothold.

Lau added that ideally, the company would look to expand into locations in the country in which its brand has become well known, with an emphasis on building up the medical tourism portfolio.

Commenting on competition from its Singaporean and Thai counterparts in the region, Lau emphasised that SHH has highly competitive fees in relation to private

hospitals in these countries, with a standard of professional training matching that of Singapore.

Meanwhile, SHH chief financial officer Chelsea Cheng said the company remains committed to working closely with the government on efforts to manage insurance premiums through the use of the diagnosis-related group (DRG) initiative.

"However at this juncture, DRG regulations are still evolving, and we are also waiting for further directives from the Health Ministry.

"We believe it is in the midst of collecting data from all private hospitals before it makes any further decisions," she said.

On a separate matter, Cheah reiterated that Sunway's RM11bil takeover offer for IJM Corp Bhd is a "commercial transaction", adding that there is no compulsion for shareholders to accept the offer.

"There is a lot of noise out there, but I stress that there is no compulsory acquisition. Sunway does not bully or hurt people.

"We see IJM as an attractive asset, so we made an offer," he said.

"There's no obligation for shareholders to sell. If they accept, fine. If they do not, we walk away. It is up to them.

"They just need to decide which boat they want to be on. If they accept, they will receive Sunway shares and participate in our growth.

"It is a 'willing buyer, willing seller' situation," said Cheah.



# Silent fight against rare disease

BY KIRTINEE RAMESH  
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**PETALING JAYA:** It begins quietly – a weakened grip, a slurred word, a stumble dismissed as fatigue. But for those diagnosed with motor neurone disease (MND), the decline is relentless, stripping away movement, speech and eventually, breath.

Also known globally as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), MND remains one of the most devastating neurological conditions in Malaysia.

While the disease gained international recognition through figures such as Stephen Hawking and campaigns such as the ice bucket challenge, local awareness is still evolving.

Legendary Malaysian footballer Mokhtar Dahari, fondly remembered as "Super Mokh", died from ALS on July 11, 1991 at the age of 37 – a stark reminder of the disease's silent toll in the country.

In conjunction with World Rare Disease Day on Feb 28, Malaysians are being urged to recognise the challenges faced by patients living with rare conditions such as MND and to support efforts aimed at strengthening awareness, early diagnosis and access to care.

According to Benny Ng, chairman of Motor Neurone Disease Malaysia, MND attacks the nerves responsible for voluntary muscle movement.

"It is like the wiring system in a car. Your brain sends signals to your muscles – to move your hands, legs or to speak. But when the wiring is damaged, the signal cannot go through."

The cause remains unknown and there is currently no cure.

Symptoms vary depending on where the disease begins – the hands, throat, legs or chest muscles.

Weak grip, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, frequent tripping and breathing problems are among the warning signs. They are often mistaken for fatigue, stroke or other conditions.

"The danger is that many think they are just tired," Ng says.

In Malaysia, the World Health Organisation estimates 30 to 50 cases per 100,000 people, translating to roughly 1,000 new cases annually and a total prevalence of 2,000 to 3,000.

➤ Awareness and early support crucial for patients facing motor neurone disease or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis: NGO



Ng said the disease attacks the nerves responsible for muscle movement and causes muscles to weaken and waste away. There is currently no cure. – AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THE SUN

Yet only 20 to 30% of patients are identified and connected to support networks.

"In rural areas especially, some doctors may not immediately recognise the symptoms. Patients go home without answers," Ng said.

Registered in 2014 and structured with full-time staff since 2022, MND Malaysia serves as a crucial bridge linking patients to neurologists in hospitals such as the University Malaya Medical Centre, Kuala Lumpur Hospital and Hospital Canselor Tuanku Muhriz.

The organisation focuses on building what Ng describes as an "ecosystem" – outsourcing specialised services while subsidising patient needs.

Since 2022, it has covered up to 80% of costs for relief caregivers, provided mobility vans and

medical equipment at negotiated prices, and delivered physiotherapy, dental and eye-care services directly to patients' homes.

"Vital devices like BiPAP machines support breathing, while eye-tracking technology enables patients who have lost speech to communicate or even write books," he said.

Beyond medical care, the association also seeks to restore dignity and create meaningful memories.

In 2023, it helped a former scientist fulfil his dream of riding a three-wheeled Harley-Davidson in Johor Bahru – he died three months later.

Another patient, a former lecturer who can neither speak nor write, realised her wish of having a family portrait taken and has since

authored three books using eye-tracking technology.

Globally, MND continues to claim high-profile lives.

Hollywood actor Eric Dane, known for his role in *Grey's Anatomy*, died from ALS last month, just months after publicly revealing his diagnosis – underscoring the disease's swift and unforgiving progression.

Despite ongoing advocacy, MND Malaysia receives no fixed government grant and relies on public donations and corporate partners.

Those wishing to help can even donate their reward points to MND Malaysia via the Petronas Setel app.

Although the Health Ministry recognises rare diseases, funding remains limited. Some RM25 million has been collectively allocated, but access is uneven.

"Those who know how to apply may get more. Those who don't – how?" said Ng, and called for transparent and equitable disbursement to ensure smaller patient groups are not overlooked.

Ng said early diagnosis remains a persistent challenge, with 99% of patients waiting one to two years for confirmation. Many are initially referred to orthopaedic or spinal specialists, losing precious time and resources.

Through its referral network, MND Malaysia aims to shorten this delay, guiding patients and families towards appropriate care and reassurance.

Raising awareness remains central. MND adviser Len Meng Fui underscores the media's role.

"Early diagnosis comes from awareness. When people read about MND, they can point someone in the right direction."

For a disease with a typical lifespan of two to five years post-diagnosis, early recognition can significantly improve quality of life.

"MND may not have a cure yet, but patients deserve dignity, comfort and hope. Awareness, timely support and a connected community can make all the difference," said Len.

Those wishing to contribute may do so via bank transfer to Persatuan Penyakit Motor Neuron Malaysia's Maybank account (514-123-636-197) and are encouraged to send proof of payment, together with their full name, to MND Malaysia via WhatsApp at +6012-901 3798.

## Ex-serviceman shares battle living with degenerative condition

**PETALING JAYA:** At 60, Ahmad Nurzahid Mohd Jusoff never imagined he would one day struggle to move his own hands. A former military serviceman with 25 years of service, Ahmad Nurzahid once led an active, physically demanding life. Sports was part of his routine, and golf was a passion. Physical strength was something he had relied on all his life.

Today, he is living with MND – and serves as a committee member of Motor Neurone Disease Malaysia, advocating for others walking the same path.

"Most people don't even know we have MND. Even some doctors initially think it is something else."

Like many patients, Ahmad Nurzahid's symptoms began subtly. Both his hands grew weaker. Simple movements became difficult. For someone who had spent decades in military service, it was alarming.

"I couldn't play golf. I couldn't do many things I used to do," he recalled.

When he sought medical help, he was first referred to orthopaedics.

For nearly a year, doctors investigated whether the weakness was related to bones, joints or muscular injury.

"I believe many patients go through the same experience. You are sent from one department to another."

During that period, he underwent five MRI scans, multiple CT scans and numerous blood

tests, yet there were no clear answers.

Eventually, he was referred to a neurologist where he underwent an electromyography (EMG) test – a procedure involving fine needles and electrical impulses to measure muscle response and nerve function.

"You cannot simply be told you have MND. The doctors have to repeat the EMG two or three times. They need to see how your muscles respond. Only then can it be confirmed."

By the end of 2022, after nearly two years of medical investigations, his diagnosis was final.

The moment of diagnosis remains etched in his memory.

"When you are told, you don't fully understand. You don't know what MND really is," said Ahmad Nurzahid.

Doctors informed him that the average life expectancy after diagnosis ranges from one to five years, depending on how aggressively the disease progresses.

"It depends on how fast the symptoms move." Then came the silence – the overwhelming mental fog that many patients describe.

After receiving his diagnosis at Kuala Lumpur Hospital, Ahmad Nurzahid did something unexpected.

"I walked home," he said. Home was in Taman Maluri, Cheras – several kilometres away.

His wife was stunned when she learned he had made the journey on foot.

"I was lost at that moment. I didn't know what

to process," he said.

For many patients, he added, reality only sinks in later – often after researching online and understanding what MND truly means.

Instead of retreating inward, Ahmad Nurzahid chose to become part of a community.

As a committee member of MND Malaysia, he helps support newly diagnosed patients who may be going through the same confusion and emotional shock he once experienced.

"The main thing is the feeling. Everybody will go through it. Depression, fear, uncertainty."

"When another patient speaks to you, it's different. They understand."

Ahmad Nurzahid believes greater awareness among both the public and medical professionals is urgently needed.

"Many don't know what MND is. Sometimes even doctors may first suspect stroke or other conditions."

The delayed recognition can cost valuable time – emotionally and medically.

Now, as both a patient and advocate, he hopes his story encourages earlier detection and stronger support systems.

"MND changes your life. But we are still here. We are still living."

For Ahmad Nurzahid, the journey is no longer just about managing a diagnosis; it is about ensuring others do not walk it alone, even if, like he once did, they start by walking home in silence.

– By Kirtinee Ramesh



Ahmad Nurzahid said because MND is difficult to detect, his diagnosis was only final after two years of medical investigations. – AMIRUL SYAFIQ/THE SUN

## RM1.69 TARGET PRICE

# No change to 'buy' stance on Duopharma

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Duopharma Biotech Bhd's results for the financial year ended Dec 31, 2025 beat estimates on the back of a strong fourth quarter, driven by robust private market demand and sustained margins.

RHB Investment Bank Bhd (RHB Research) said the company's core earnings of RM97 million for financial year 2025 came in ahead of both its and consensus full-year estimates at 105 per cent.

"The positive deviation stemmed from an unusually strong fourth quarter, which historically tends to be the weakest quarter.

"With multiple earnings drivers ahead, Duopharma enters this year on stronger footing, though labour cost pressures and

dual-supplier risks remain. We continue to like the stock due to solid earnings visibility and an attractive dividend yield of four per cent."

The firm nudged up its earnings forecasts by less than one per cent for financial years 2026 and 2027 following a model refresh.

It maintained a "buy" call on Duopharma with a higher target price of RM1.69.

"We continue to highlight the possibility of a dual-supplier outcome. Should the Health Ministry decide to split the contract equally between Duopharma and its competitors, we estimate a potential five per cent earnings impact on our financial year 2027 forecast, assuming a 10 per cent net profit margin."

# Fasting with care

► Avoiding digestive discomfort, strengthening health during Ramadan

**T**HE anticipation of breaking fast is often accompanied by the inviting aroma of freshly prepared *kah*, rich gravies and sweet beverages laid out on the table. After hours without food or drink, the urge to indulge can be strong. Yet for some, the night ends with bloating, discomfort or recurring heartburn.

Ramadan is a time of spiritual reflection and renewal. It also presents an opportunity to adopt a more mindful and balanced approach to physical well-being. However, digestive discomfort such as acid reflux, bloating, constipation and fatigue may arise during the fasting month, often linked to dietary habits between *iftar* and *sahur*. Rather than placing strain on the body, fasting can be used as a period to restore and support gut health.

During fasting, the digestive system is given time to rest. Gastric acid production is reduced and inflammatory triggers may decrease, contributing to improved gut health. These benefits, however, can be reversed by overeating at *iftar*, inadequate hydration and insufficient fibre intake.

## Why digestive discomfort increases during Ramadan

Many individuals notice a rise in gastrointestinal complaints during Ramadan. Bloating, acid reflux and constipation are commonly reported. Contributing factors include heavy meals, oily or spicy dishes, dehydration and prolonged gaps between meals.

Overeating at *iftar* is a frequent trigger, particularly when meals consist of deep fried or heavily spiced foods. Insufficient water intake and low fibre consumption further strain the digestive system. Reduced

physical activity also plays a role. Changes in sleep patterns and lower energy levels may lead to less movement, which can slow digestion and worsen constipation.

## Sahur sets tone for day

Skipping *sahur* or opting for convenient fast food choices may seem practical, but these habits often contribute to digestive issues later in the day. A balanced *sahur* that digests slowly helps sustain energy and protect the stomach.

An ideal pre-dawn meal includes complex carbohydrates such as oats or brown rice, protein sources such as eggs, fish or tofu and water-rich fruits including watermelon or cucumber. Yoghurt may support gut health through its probiotic content for those without lactose intolerance. Spicy and greasy foods are best avoided at *sahur* as they can irritate the stomach lining and increase the likelihood of reflux during the day.

## Breaking fast gently

At *iftar*, the stomach benefits from a gradual return to eating. Sugary drinks, excessive fried food and very salty dishes may be tempting but often lead to bloating and indigestion. Beginning with water and a few dates, followed by a short pause before the main meal, allows the body to adjust. Eating slowly and choosing a balanced plate with complex carbohydrates, lean protein and healthy fats can support smoother digestion.

Late night eating can also contribute to discomfort. *Moreh*, the light meal shared after *tanawih* prayers, is a cherished tradition in Malaysia. However, keeping this meal light and allowing a gap of two to three hours between the final meal and bedtime may help reduce acid reflux



Mindful eating and hydration are key to maintaining gut health throughout Ramadan.

and other digestive disturbances.

## Hydration is essential

Constipation remains one of the most common complaints during Ramadan and is frequently linked to inadequate fluid intake. Many individuals consume less than their daily water requirements during the fasting month. Proper hydration supports digestion and also helps prevent headaches and fatigue.

A daily intake of two to 2.5 litres of water between *iftar* and *sahur* is recommended. Sipping fluids consistently rather than consuming large amounts at once is more effective. Including water rich fruits in meals can help, while excessive caffeine intake should be limited as it may worsen dehydration.

## Those who require extra caution

Fasting is generally safe for healthy adults, but individuals with pre-existing gastrointestinal conditions may face higher risks. Conditions such as ulcerative colitis, duodenal ulcers, upper

gastrointestinal bleeding and moderate to severe liver cirrhosis may flare during fasting and require careful monitoring and medical guidance.

For individuals on gastric medication, taking it about 30 minutes before *sahur* may improve effectiveness. Persistent abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea or blood in the stool are warning signs that warrant immediate medical attention rather than continuing the fast despite symptoms.

## Fibre for smoother Ramadan

National data indicates that a significant proportion of Malaysians do not meet recommended daily fruit and vegetable intake. This shortfall contributes to inadequate fibre consumption, which can worsen constipation and bloating during Ramadan.

Fibre supports regular bowel movements, helps regulate blood sugar, lowers cholesterol and promotes satiety. Gradually increasing fibre intake through fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains can

minimise gas and discomfort while improving overall digestive health.

## Carry healthy habits forward

The fasting month does not have to serve as a temporary reset. Mindful eating, adequate hydration and appropriate meal spacing can be continued beyond Ramadan. Older adults in particular should ensure sufficient protein and fibre intake to maintain muscle strength and digestive function.

A healthier gut supports a more comfortable fasting experience and allows greater focus on the spiritual meaning of the month. Moderation, proper hydration and attentiveness to bodily signals are essential. When symptoms arise, seeking timely medical evaluation is always advisable rather than enduring discomfort in silence.

*This article is contributed by Sunway Medical Centre, Sunway City consultant gastroenterologist and hepatologist Dr Sheikh Anwar Abdullch.*

## Persistent cough should never be ignored: Early TB screening matters

**T**HE latest figures from the Health Ministry show that as of Feb 21, 3,161 tuberculosis (TB) cases have been recorded nationwide. The increase has been attributed to continued community transmission, with the public advised to remain cautious, particularly during frequent social gatherings and in enclosed spaces.

TB continues to be a long-standing public health concern in Malaysia. Early detection and strict completion of treatment remain the most effective ways to control the disease and prevent further spread.

## TB: slow to develop, easily overlooked

TB is caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and spreads mainly through the air. When an infected person coughs or speaks, bacteria can remain suspended in the air for several hours, especially in poorly ventilated indoor environments. Symptoms often develop

gradually and may include a cough lasting longer than two to three weeks, low-grade fever in the afternoon, night sweats, unexplained weight loss and ongoing fatigue. Because these signs can resemble a common cold or what some describe as body heat, many individuals opt for self-medication with cough remedies. This may delay proper screening and diagnosis, allowing the infection to progress unnoticed.

## Prolonged cough is warning sign

Although awareness of respiratory symptoms has improved, persistent coughing is still frequently underestimated. A cough that continues beyond two to three weeks, even without a high fever, should prompt further medical evaluation such as a chest X-ray or sputum test. Cough medicines may temporarily ease discomfort but do not treat TB. Early diagnosis improves treatment success rates

and lowers the risk of spreading the infection to family members and close contacts.

Certain groups face a higher risk of developing TB, including individuals living with diabetes, smokers, those who experience chronic stress or sleep deprivation and elderly individuals or people with weakened immune systems.

## Treatment is effective but must be completed

The Health Ministry has emphasised that TB is curable. However, standard treatment requires at least six months of uninterrupted medication. Stopping treatment too soon can lead to drug resistant TB, which is more difficult to manage and poses greater public health risks.

Medication adherence is crucial, even during festive periods or travel. Missing doses increases the likelihood of resistance and reduces the effectiveness of therapy.

## Practical steps to reduce transmission

Simple preventive measures can help limit the spread of TB within the community. Indoor spaces should be ventilated every two to three hours, and even when air conditioning is in use, windows should be opened for at least 15 minutes to improve air circulation. Spending more time outdoors and increasing exposure to sunlight can also help, as direct sunlight significantly reduces the survival time of TB bacteria.

Individuals who experience a cough lasting more than two weeks should seek screening rather than repeatedly purchasing cough medication. Wearing a mask when experiencing respiratory symptoms is advisable, particularly in crowded or enclosed settings. Good blood sugar control is important, as diabetes increases susceptibility to infection, and maintaining adequate sleep supports immune function.

Personal items such as utensils, cups and towels should not be shared. Those who live with or have frequent close contact with a person diagnosed with TB are encouraged to undergo appropriate testing.

## Prevention begins with awareness

The ministry has clarified that the rise beyond 3,000 reported cases reflects sustained community transmission rather than isolated clusters. Public cooperation is essential, alongside efforts to reduce stigma and misconceptions surrounding TB.

Individuals with symptoms or concerns are encouraged to seek professional medical advice. Early consultation and timely screening play a vital role in protecting personal health and safeguarding the well-being of family members.

*This article is contributed by Alpro Pharmacy chief pharmacist Lim EnNL*

# Colorectal cancer surge in under-50s remains a mystery

**T**HE death of United States actor James Van Der Beek was the latest reminder that colorectal cancer has been surging among people under 50 in recent years — and no one knows why.

The 'Dawson's Creek' star died Feb 11 aged 48 after being diagnosed with colorectal cancer, also known as bowel cancer.

Fellow US actor Chadwick Boseman of 'Black Panther' fame died from the same disease in 2020 at the age of 43.

The rate of people under 50 being diagnosed with this cancer has risen by roughly a third since the 1990s, Helen Coleman, a cancer epidemiology professor at Queen's University Belfast, told AFP.

It is now the leading cause of death from cancer among under-50s in the US, according to research published in the 'JAMA' journal last month.

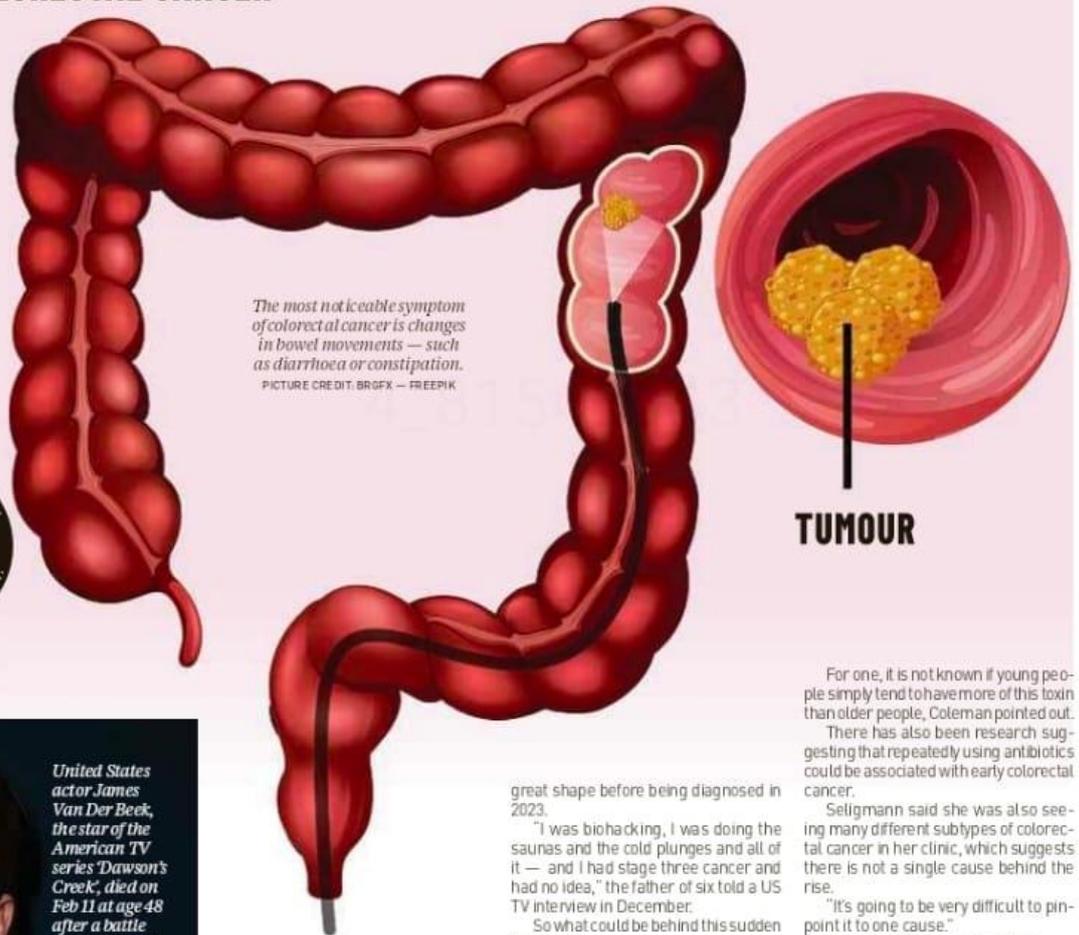
This "sounds really scary", but the increase has come from a low starting point, Coleman emphasised.

The vast majority of cases are still among older people — only six per cent of all colorectal cancers are diagnosed in people under 50, according to her research in Northern Ireland.

And rates are stabilising or even going down among older people in some areas because of better screening, she added.



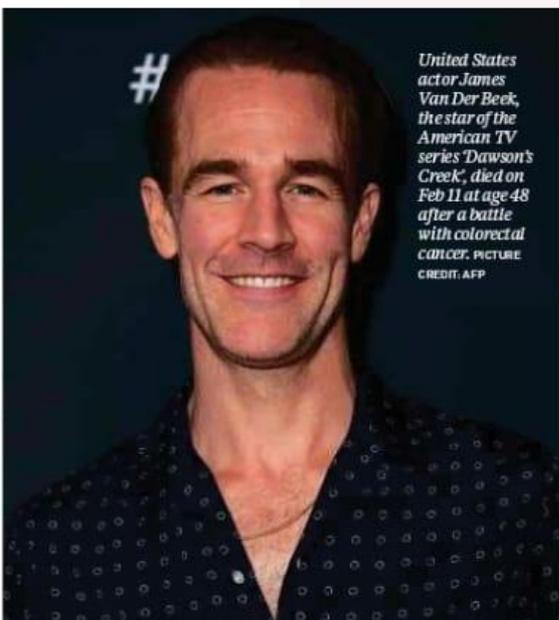
## COLORECTAL CANCER



The most noticeable symptom of colorectal cancer is changes in bowel movements — such as diarrhoea or constipation.

PICTURE CREDIT: BRGFX — FREEMK

## TUMOUR



United States actor James Van Der Beek, the star of the American TV series 'Dawson's Creek', died on Feb 11 at age 48 after a battle with colorectal cancer. PICTURE CREDIT: AFP

However, young people are less likely to think they could be susceptible to this cancer, which was long considered to only be suffered by the elderly.

Once younger people finally get diagnosed, it is often too late — as was the case with Van Der Beek.

What is driving this increase? Similar to other cancers among young people, colorectal cancer has been linked with being overweight, having a bad diet, not exercising enough, drinking and smoking.

But these lifestyle factors are not enough to "account for the massive change that we have seen in a relatively short time frame", Coleman said.

And many of the younger patients appear to have been in good health, including Van Der Beek, who was in

great shape before being diagnosed in 2023.

"I was biohacking, I was doing the saunas and the cold plunges and all of it — and I had stage three cancer and had no idea," the father of six told a US TV interview in December.

So what could be behind this sudden increase?

"We don't know," said Jenny Seligmann, a researcher specialising in colorectal cancer at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom.

This mystery has led researchers to look for other potential causes, including inside the microbiome, a vast ecosystem of microbes in our guts that remains little understood.

A study in the journal 'Nature' last year discovered a "really important first clue" in this area, Coleman said.

It found that DNA mutations of a toxin called colibactin, which is caused by the common bacteria E. Coli, were much more common in younger people with colorectal cancer than in older patients.

But more research is needed in this area.

For one, it is not known if young people simply tend to have more of this toxin than older people, Coleman pointed out.

There has also been research suggesting that repeatedly using antibiotics could be associated with early colorectal cancer.

Seligmann said she was also seeing many different subtypes of colorectal cancer in her clinic, which suggests there is not a single cause behind the rise.

"It's going to be very difficult to pinpoint it to one cause."

When should screening start? Before his death, a gaunt-looking Van Der Beek urged people with any symptoms to consider getting tested.

"I want to shout from the rooftops — if you are 45 or older, talk to your doctor," the father of six said.

The most noticeable symptom of colorectal cancer is changes in bowel movements — such as diarrhoea or constipation.

Other symptoms include blood in faeces, unexplained weight loss and fatigue.

Because of the increasing number of younger cases, in 2021 the US lowered the age it starts colorectal cancer screening from 50 to 45.

There have been calls for other countries to do the same. The UK and France start screening from age 50.

# Food safety must remain priority at Ramadan bazaar — Dr Annuar

**SIBU:** This year's Ramadan bazaar at Dataran Tun Tuanku Bujang Phase 2 continues to draw strong visitor turnout, with traders reporting encouraging sales and steady demand throughout the fasting month.

Deputy Minister of Education, Innovation and Talent Development Datuk Dr Annuar Rapae said many traders expressed satisfaction with their business sales performance during his recent walkabout at the bazaar.

"Alhamdulillah (Praise be for Allah), the response this year is very encouraging. Most traders told me they are satisfied with their earnings. I am grateful because this helps generate income for them during Ramadan," he said.

Dr Annuar, however, reminded traders to uphold strict hygiene standards, stressing that food safety must remain a top priority in a high-traffic setting.

The Nangka assemblyman also said the council's QR-code complaint system had already received several submissions



Dr Annuar (right) interacts with a trader during his walkabout at the Ramadan bazaar.

from visitors.

"The Health Ministry (MoH) has also placed its own QR codes at various locations around the bazaar to streamline public feedback.

"To all visitors, if you encounter issues with cleanliness or food quality, I encourage you to use the QR code provided. This helps ensure traders maintain proper standards," he said.

Dr Annuar added that the

relevant authorities would liaise with the MoH to determine whether further action or advisory measures were required, depending on the nature of complaints received.

With visitor numbers expected to rise as Ramadan enters its peak weeks, Dr Annuar urged all food handlers to remain vigilant and ensure their preparation and storage practices would comply fully with safety guidelines.

# Amalan yang Perlu Dielakkan Selepas Makan

**SELEPAS** menikmati hidangan yang lazat, ramai antara kita cenderung melakukan pelbagai aktiviti tanpa menyedari bahawa sesetengah tabiat tersebut sebenarnya tidak baik untuk kesihatan. Selepas makan, proses penghadaman memerlukan masa dan aliran darah yang mencukupi di bahagian perut serta usus. Oleh itu, terdapat beberapa tabiat yang tidak boleh dilakukan selepas makan kerana boleh menjejaskan sistem pencernaan dan kesihatan tubuh secara keseluruhan.

Salah satu tabiat yang tidak digalakkan selepas makan ialah terus berbaring atau tidur seurus menikmati hidangan. Apabila seseorang berbaring dalam keadaan perut yang masih penuh, asid dalam perut lebih mudah naik semula ke esofagus dan menyebabkan pedih ulu hati atau refluks asid. Keadaan ini bukan sahaja menimbulkan rasa tidak selesa, malah jika berlarutan boleh membawa kepada masalah kesihatan yang lebih serius. Oleh itu, adalah lebih baik untuk menunggu sekurang-kurangnya satu hingga dua jam sebelum tidur supaya makanan dapat dihadam dengan lebih sempurna.

Selain itu, melakukan senaman berat selepas makan juga merupakan amalan yang tidak digalakkan. Aktiviti seperti berlari, bermain bola sepak atau melakukan senaman intensiti tinggi akan menyebabkan aliran darah tertumpu kepada otot dan bukannya sistem pencernaan. Hal ini boleh mengganggu proses penghadaman dan menyebabkan kekejangan perut, loya atau muntah.

Tabiat merokok selepas makan juga harus dielakkan. Ramai perokok berpendapat bahawa merokok selepas makan memberikan kepuasan, namun hakikatnya ia membahayakan kesihatan. Nikotin boleh merangsang pengeluaran asid perut dan meningkatkan risiko gangguan gastrik. Malah, merokok secara berterusan dikaitkan dengan pelbagai penyakit kronik seperti kanser dan penyakit jantung. Oleh itu, menjauhi rokok bukan sahaja penting selepas makan, malah dalam setiap keadaan.

Seterusnya, mandi seurus selepas makan juga tidak digalakkan. Ketika

mandi, terutamanya dengan air sejuk, aliran darah akan berubah dan tertumpu ke permukaan kulit. Ini boleh mengurangkan aliran darah ke perut dan seterusnya melambatkan proses penghadaman. Walaupun kesannya mungkin tidak terlalu ketara dalam jangka masa pendek, tabiat ini boleh menyebabkan ketidakselesaan perut jika diamalkan secara kerap.

Mengambil buah-buahan serta-merta selepas menikmati hidangan berat juga merupakan amalan yang kurang sesuai. Hal ini kerana buah-buahan dicerna dengan lebih cepat berbanding makanan berat seperti nasi dan daging. Jika buah dimakan terus selepas makan, ia boleh bercampur dengan makanan lain yang masih belum dihadam sepenuhnya, lalu menyebabkan kembung atau ketidakselesaan. Sebaiknya, buah-buahan diambil satu hingga dua jam sebelum atau selepas waktu makan utama bagi memastikan proses pencernaan berjalan dengan lancar.

Akhir sekali, minum teh atau kopi seurus selepas makan juga tidak digalakkan. Minuman ini mengandungi kafein dan tanin yang boleh mengganggu penyerapan zat besi daripada makanan. Dalam jangka masa panjang, keadaan ini boleh menyumbang kepada masalah kekurangan zat besi, terutamanya bagi individu yang berisiko.

Kesimpulannya, menjaga tingkah laku selepas makan adalah sama penting dengan memilih makanan yang sihat. Tabiat seperti tidur terus, bersenam berat, merokok, mandi, makan buah serta-merta dan minum minuman berkafein selepas makan wajar dielakkan demi memastikan sistem pencernaan berfungsi dengan baik. Dengan mengamalkan gaya hidup yang lebih teratur dan berdisiplin, kita dapat mengekalkan kesihatan yang optimum dan meningkatkan kualiti hidup secara keseluruhan.



**Alor Setar:** Jabatan Kesihatan Negeri Kedah (JKNK) mengesan terdapat pekerja bazar Ramadan di negeri ini yang tidak mengambil suntikan anti-tifoid serta tidak menghadiri kursus pengendalian makanan.

Pengerusi Jawatankuasa Perumahan, Kerajaan Tempatan dan Kesihatan Kedah, Mejar (B) Mansor Zakaria berkata, walaupun ia membabitkan jumlah kecil berbanding tahun lalu namun langkah itu penting untuk memastikan kesihatan serta sebagai syarat utama berniaga di bazar Ramadan.

Beliau berkata, hasil pemeriksaan bermula awal Ramadan sehingga 25 Fe-

## ***JKNK kesan pekerja bazar tak ambil suntikan anti-tifoid***

bruari lalu mendapati hanya tiga peratus yang tidak mendapat suntikan anti-tifoid berbanding 10 peratus tahun lalu manakala 10 peratus tidak menghadiri kursus pengendalian makanan berbanding 15 peratus tahun lalu.

"Kadang tak ambil suntikan anti-tifoid ini pekerja tapi peniaga atau pemilik lesen ambil. Mungkin mereka kalut sampai terlupa.

"Kebanyakan pemilik lesen atau peniaga tak pernah abaikan, mereka akan

ikut syarat ditetapkan.

"Sebab itu kita perlu buat kempen kesedaran seperti ini, kalau peniaga nak ambil 10 pekerja, pastikan semua menerima suntikan ini. Kadang ada ganti pekerja, bila kita buat pemeriksaan tak ada suntikan, itu yang masalah," katanya selepas merasmikan Kick-off Kedah Ke Arah Bebas Keracunan Makanan di bawah Inisiatif Makanan Selamat Warisan Kedah anjuran Jabatan Kesihatan Negeri Kedah dan sesi Wal-

kabout di Bazar Ramadan, Stadium Darul Aman di sini, kelmarin.

Hadir sama, Pengarah Kesihatan Kedah, Dr Dr Nor'Aishah Abu Bakar dan Datuk Bandar Alor Setar, Datuk Abdul Gafar Yahya serta Pengarah Bahagian Pematuhan dan Pembangunan Industri, mewakili Timbalan Ketua Pengarah Kesihatan (Keselamatan dan Kualiti Makanan), Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (KKM), Mahamad Sukor Senapi.

## RIADAH WAKTU MALAM

## Tubuh manusia ada hadnya



Bersama  
**Nazmizan  
Muhammad**



Kesihatan bukan tentang siapa paling kuat atau paling kerap bersenam. Ia tentang siapa yang paling bijak menjaga keseimbangan

Setiap kali Ramadan tiba, waktu malam bukan sekadar dipenuhi dengan aktiviti ibadah, sebaliknya selepas terbuka dan solat Tarawih, taman rekreasi, gelanggang futsal dan terkini gelanggang pickleball kembali hidup dengan kebanjiran pengguna yang ingin terus mengamalkan gaya hidup sihat. Lazimnya, ramai individu mengambil peluang bersenam pada waktu malam kerana berasa lebih selamat dan selesa selepas seharian berpuasa, namun yang sering diabaikan ialah kesediaan dan keadaan sebenar tubuh untuk melakukan aktiviti fizikal selepas berpuasa antara 12 hingga 14 jam pada sianginya.

Bersenam ialah amalan gaya hidup sihat yang sangat digalakkan. Namun, dalam sains sukan, bukan hanya jenis aktiviti yang penting, namun waktu dan keadaan tubuh ketika melakukannya turut memainkan peranan kritikal.

Jika disoroti laporan media, kita sering kali dikejutkan dengan beberapa kes kematian mengejut ketika bersukan antaranya bermain futsal, badminton, berjoging dan berbasikal pada waktu malam yang hal ini sedikit sebanyak memerlukan kita untuk memahami dengan jelas kesediaan tubuh untuk melakukan aktiviti fizikal.

Perlu difahami bahawa tubuh manusia ibarat sebuah sistem yang sangat teratur dan pintar. Setiap sel, tisu dan organ bekerja seperti satu pasukan yang saling bergantung antara satu sama lain untuk memastikan badan kekal stabil.

Dalam bahasa mudah, tubuh sentiasa berusaha mengekalkan keseimbangan dalaman atau homeostasis supaya kita boleh berfungsi dengan baik dari pagi hingga malam.

Justeru, apabila menjelang malam, tubuh sebenarnya sedang bersedia untuk 'menutup operasi' secara berperingkat.

Denyutan jantung mula perlahan, tekanan darah menjadi lebih stabil dan hormon melatonin meningkat sebagai isyarat bahawa masa untuk berehat sudah tiba.

Dalam terma yang lebih mudah difahami, tubuh kita boleh diibaratkan seperti enjin

kereta yang baru selesai perjalanan jauh dan sedang melalui proses *cooling down*. Jika enjin yang panas itu dipaksa memecut semula secara tiba-tiba, risiko kerosakan tentu lebih tinggi.

Tekanan mendadak terhadap jantung dan sistem peredaran darah ketika tubuh sedang bersedia untuk berehat boleh memberi beban tambahan, terutama jika ada masalah kesihatan yang tidak disedari.

Atas dasar itu, semua pihak perlu menanamkan dalam diri masing-masing akan fakta penting bahawa bersenam bukan sekadar soal semangat dan disiplin, tetapi juga soal memahami bahasa tubuh sendiri.

Sebagai bekas atlet negara, saya sendiri pernah menjalani latihan intensif sebanyak dua sesi sehari, pagi dan petang, terutama ketika fasa persiapan menghadapi kejohanan utama. Namun, setiap sesi terbahagi tidak dilakukan secara sembarangan.

Ia dilaksanakan dengan pemantauan rapi serta perancangan terperinci oleh pasukan kejurulatihan yang turut dianggotai pakar fisiologi, pegawai perubatan sukan, jurupulih anggota dan pakar pemakanan dari Institut Sukan Negara serta Majlis Sukan Negara.

Setiap latihan mempunyai objektif jelas, kawalan intensiti dan tempoh tertentu. Denyutan jantung dipantau, beban latihan direkod, tahap keletihan dinilai,

malah waktu tidur dan pemakanan juga diurus dengan sistematik.

Jika bacaan tubuh menunjukkan tanda keletihan melampau, latihan akan diubah suai atau dihentikan. Dalam sukan profesional, pemulihan bukan pilihan, tetapi sebahagian daripada strategi prestasi.

Atlet elit diajar bahawa kemajuan sebenar bukan berlaku ketika latihan semata-mata, tetapi ketika tubuh diberi ruang untuk pulih. Otot membina semula kekuatan, sistem tenaga distabilkan dan hormon kembali seimbang ketika fasa rehat. Tanpa pemulihan yang mencukupi, risiko kecederaan dan tekanan terhadap jantung akan meningkat.

Sebab itu, apabila melihat masyarakat bersukan dalam keadaan tubuh sudah penat selepas bekerja atau berpuasa, timbul kebimbangan kerana kebanyakan mereka tidak mempunyai sistem pemantauan seperti atlet profesional. Semangat untuk sihat memang terpuji, tetapi tubuh tetap memerlukan keseimbangan dan kefahaman terhadap hadnya.

Bagi masyarakat umum, riadah waktu malam tidak semestinya perlu dihentikan sepenuhnya. Ramai hanya mempunyai waktu terbahagi untuk bersenam.

Namun, pendekatan perlu lebih berhati-hati. Kurangkan intensiti jika tubuh terlalu letih, pastikan hidrasi mencukupi,

lakukan pemanasan badan yang sempurna dan dapatkan pemeriksaan kesihatan berkala, terutama selepas usia 35 tahun atau jika mempunyai sejarah keluarga penyakit jantung.

Waktu malam juga adalah tempoh penting untuk pemulihan mental dan keseimbangan sosial. Rehat berkualiti serta masa bersama keluarga membantu mengurangkan tekanan kronik yang turut menjadi faktor risiko penyakit jantung.

Keseimbangan antara kerja, riadah dan rehat adalah asas kesihatan jangka panjang.

Bersenam bukan satu kesalahan, malah ia satu keperluan dalam kehidupan moden, namun dalam keghairahan menjaga kecegahan, kita tidak boleh mengabaikan satu hakikat penting — tubuh manusia ada hadnya.

Dalam dunia yang sentiasa mengejar prestasi, mungkin sudah tiba masanya kita belajar satu perkara asas — kesihatan bukan tentang siapa paling kuat atau paling kerap bersenam. Ia tentang siapa yang paling bijak menjaga keseimbangan. Kerana akhirnya, tujuan bersenam adalah untuk amalan gaya hidup sihat dan penjagaan kesihatan dan bukan untuk pertaruhan.

**Penulis Pensyarah Kanan di Jabatan Bahasa dan Pengajian Umum, Fakulti Pemiagaan dan Komunikasi Universiti Malaysia Perlis**

## dialog kotaraya oleh Yon





# Muzik SEBAGAI TERAPI

Kebaikan Terhadap  
Kesihatan Mental

**MUZIK telah lama dikenali sebagai suatu bentuk ekspresi seni yang bukan sahaja menghiburkan tetapi juga mempunyai banyak manfaat untuk kesihatan mental.**

Terapi muzik, yang melibatkan penggunaan muzik untuk merawat individu yang mengalami pelbagai masalah psikologi atau emosi, semakin mendapat perhatian di kalangan pakar kesihatan mental.

Apakah terapi muzik?

Muzik dipercayai dapat mempengaruhi emosi dan meningkatkan neurokimia dalam tubuh, termasuk pengeluaran endorfin yang bermanfaat. Terapi muzik, yang dikenali sebagai terapi muzik aktif atau pasif, terbukti berkesan dalam memperbaiki kawalan motor dan fungsi emosi bagi pesakit dengan pelbagai penyakit atau ketidakupayaan. Dari kes skizofrenia hingga penyakit Parkinson, muzik dapat membantu mengurangkan simptom semula jadi masalah kesihatan seperti kemurungan atau kegelisahan, merangsang kreativiti, serta memperbaiki komunikasi antara pesakit dan penjaga, bersama-sama dengan pelbagai manfaat lain.

## Manfaat terapi muzik

**1.** Mengurangkan Stres dan Kecemasan. Muzik yang tenang dan melodi yang lembut mampu menenangkan sistem saraf, mengurangkan tekanan darah, dan mengawal kadar denyutan jantung. Mendengar muzik yang menenangkan boleh membantu seseorang mengurangkan perasaan cemas dan stres.

**2.** Meningkatkan Mood dan Mengatasi Depresi. Muzik boleh bertindak sebagai perangsang emosi. Lagu-lagu dengan irama yang ceria dan lirik yang positif mampu memberikan kesan

langsung terhadap mood seseorang. Bagi individu yang mengalami kemurungan, terapi muzik boleh membantu mereka merasa lebih baik dan memberi mereka perasaan harapan dan semangat untuk terus berjuang.

**3.** Menggalakkan Ekspresi Diri. Muzik memberi ruang bagi individu mengekspresikan perasaan mereka. Bagi mereka yang sukar untuk mengungkapkan perasaan melalui kata-kata, bermain muzik atau menyanyi dapat menjadi cara untuk melepaskan emosi yang terpendam.

**4.** Meningkatkan Ingatan dan Kemahiran Kognitif. Mendengar muzik atau memainkan alat muzik dapat merangsang otak, meningkatkan daya ingatan, dan meningkatkan fungsi kognitif. Aktiviti seperti bermain alat muzik boleh merangsang beberapa bahagian otak yang membantu dalam proses pembelajaran, penyelesaian masalah, dan pemikiran kreatif.

**5.** Meningkatkan Kualiti Tidur. Muzik yang menenangkan atau alunan muzik yang perlahan dapat membantu mengurangkan kecemasan dan mempersiapkan tubuh untuk tidur yang lebih baik. Muzik yang menenangkan merangsang pengeluaran hormon yang menggalakkan tidur yang lebih lena dan berkualiti.

Kesimpulannya, muzik mempunyai kuasa yang luar biasa dalam meningkatkan kesejahteraan mental. Ia bukan hanya sekadar hiburan, tetapi juga alat yang sangat berkesan dalam terapi untuk merawat pelbagai masalah psikologi. Sama ada melalui mendengar atau bermain muzik, terapi muzik menawarkan banyak faedah yang boleh membantu individu untuk menguruskan kesihatan mental mereka dengan lebih baik.

