

# Malaysia can cater to the rise in medical tourism

by SHAHEERA AZNAM SHAH

**PRIVATE** healthcare operators in the country can cater to the expected rise of patients, due to the boon in the country's medical tourism sector.

Medical tourism, which is fast becoming an important component of the lucrative tourism industry, is expected to record a 20% to 30% rise in revenue this year.

National Heart Institute (IJN) CEO Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Azhari Yakub said medical facilities in Malaysia are equipped with the world standard technologies and are manned by experts who would be able to cater to the rise of foreign patients.

"It is a good move by the government to promote medical tourism through the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC). The country's healthcare system is more than able to cater for the patients from other countries," he said at the launching of Life Insurance Association of Malaysia's (LIAM) Heart Awareness Booklet at IJN in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The booklet contains information about the heart: Risk factors, symptoms, special procedures and treatments.

IJN, Malaysia's leading cardio-

vascular healthcare centre, was established in 1992. It specialises in the management and treatment of heart diseases.

MHTC has projected that the country's medical tourism would generate RM1.3 billion worth of revenue from the 20% to 30% projected growth in 2017.

In 2016, MHTC estimated around 900,000 foreigners came to Malaysia to seek various medical treatments with a billing of over RM1 billion.

Excellent facilities, large pool of medical experts and the better exchange rate compared to countries like Singapore, make Malaysia an attractive destination for foreigners who need medical care.

Dr Mohd Azhari said besides medical tourism, medical practitioners who were expanding their specialisation had selected IJN as well.

About 110 doctors from India, Vietnam, Myanmar, Japan, Middle East and the West had undergone their specialist training at IJN, he said.

"It's a measure of the recognition that Malaysia can offer world standard training and expertise," he said,

adding that the heart specialist centre had to reject applications from doctors abroad in order to cater to local medical practitioners.

On the collaboration with LIAM, Dr Mohd Azhari said this was the first such partnership with the insurance association.

"We have been working closely with LIAM to produce this booklet to educate the public about the number one cause of death among men and women for the past 10 years, which also accounts for 25% of deaths in private and government hospitals," he said.

According to the 2015 National Heart and Mobility Survey, heart disease is the number one cause of death for men and women in the country.

Meanwhile, LIAM president Toi See Jong said the booklet will be distributed by life insurance agents across the country to increase knowledge among the public.

"We have over 15 insurance companies and over 18,000 of life insurance agents. It is our responsibility as an insurance company to educate the public about the disease and how to avoid it and not just about the insurance plan," he said.



Pic by Afif Abd Halim

(From left) IJN COO Akmal Arief Mohamed Fauzi with Dr Mohd Azhari and Toi during a visit to the pediatric ward after the launch of LIAM's Heart Awareness Booklet at IJN in Kuala Lumpur yesterday