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Prioritise data protection amid healthcare digital transformation

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KOTA KINABALU: Personal data protection must be prioritised as digital technology continues to transform healthcare delivery, ensuring that innovation is carried out safely, responsibly and with public confidence.

Sabah Minister of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Datuk James Ratib said advances in technology, data and innovation were reshaping healthcare sector, but emphasised that digital progress must be supported by strong data governance, information security and effective personal data protection.

His speech was delivered by assistant minister Jordan Jude Ellron during the opening of PDPA Connect Sabah 2026: Towards a Smart and Safe Healthcare Data Ecosystem at the Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Chancellor Hall on Tuesday.

James said digitalisation and innovation were no longer optional, but strategic necessities to ensure public services remained efficient, inclusive and resilient.

"We are living in an era where technology, data and innovation are driving change across almost every sector, including healthcare.

"However, digital advancement must move in tandem with good data governance, robust information security and effective personal data protection," he said.

James said the theme of the forum carried a significant message that the future of healthcare depended not only on the ability to adopt smart technologies, but also on ensuring that health data was managed securely, responsibly and in a manner that earned public trust.

He said data played an essential role in helping healthcare professionals make better decisions, improving hospital operations, supporting research and enabling evidence-based policymaking and innovation.

However, he stressed that



Jordan (centre) receives a token of appreciation from Luqman.

the development of a digital healthcare ecosystem must place equal emphasis on data security and privacy.

"Good technology is not merely technology that makes processes easier, but technology that protects the interests of the people," he added.

The use of technologies such as electronic health records, digital appointment systems, telehealth services and data analytics, he said, offered significant opportunities to enhance the efficiency and accessibility of healthcare services.

However, he cautioned that these developments also brought new responsibilities for organisations handling and sharing personal information.

"Data protection should not be viewed solely from a legal perspective.

"It must also be understood in

terms of operational practices, technology, organisational culture and public trust," he added.

Within the fields of education, science, technology and innovation, James described personal data protection as a key component in building a sustainable digital future.

He highlighted the important role played by institutions such as UMS and Hospital Universiti Malaysia Sabah (HUMS), not only in delivering services and developing talent, but also in promoting sound data governance practices.

"We need more professionals who are not only skilled in healthcare and technology, but who also understand the importance of data protection, information security and the responsible use of data," he said.

James expressed confidence that Sabah had strong potential

to develop an inclusive, smart and secure digital healthcare ecosystem through the support of academic institutions, healthcare providers and regulatory bodies.

He also expressed hope that PDPA Connect Sabah 2026 would serve as a catalyst for greater strategic collaboration between the Personal Data Protection Department (JPD), the Sabah government, UMS, HUMS, the healthcare sector and industry stakeholders in strengthening the state's digital framework.

Among those present were UMS registrar Luqman Ridha Anwar, representing UMS vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Kasim Mansor; Personal Data Protection Commissioner Shariffah Rashidah Syed Othman; and HUMS director Associate Prof Dr Malehah Mohd Noh.



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SUMMARIES

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