

Studies on systemic lupus erythematosus to be conducted – minister

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By ERIC BAGANG

KOTA KINABALU: The Health and People's Wellbeing Ministry will conduct studies on Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) with help from hospitals and Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).

Its minister, Datuk Frankie Poon Ming Fung said that the ministry is working with various agencies to create awareness of the disease among the people in Sabah, especially in rural areas.

"I will look into this matter and see how we can help out. We need more research especially in Sabah context. Until now, nobody knows what causes the disease. If we don't know the cause, it is difficult to help (the patients).

"There are 342 SLE patients registered with Queen Elizabeth Hospital, but there could be more unregistered out there, and as for now, 30 per cent of the patients are from Sabah's indigenous community," he told New Sabah Times when met at the 'SLE Walk A Payung' 2019 programme at Perdana Park in Tanjung Aru here yesterday.

Walk A Payung was jointly organised by Persatuan SLE Malaysia Sabah Chapter, Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) to create awareness on SLE.

Persatuan SLE Malaysia Sabah Chapter, Dr Eleen Chong Yun Yin said that the association will present a paper to Health and People's Wellbeing Ministry to create better understanding of the disease and the resources needed to handle it.

Dr Eleen, who is also Rheumatologist at Gleneagles Hospital, Kota Kinabalu said that SLE patients can live healthy lives if the disease is detected at the early stage, as there



Frankie (centre), Dr Eleen (on Frankie's left) and the participants posing for photographs.

are treatments available.

Meanwhile, UMS Head of Medicine Based Department, Dr Malehah Mohd Noh who is also Consultant Rheumatologist said that the awareness in Sabah is very low which resulted in late diagnosis among patients.

"Most of the cases, these patients were diagnosed late and by that time, it was difficult to reverse the damages caused by the disease. If patients

are not treated early, their organs such as kidneys, heart and even brain would be damaged already.

"The death rate from SLE in Sabah is very high, there is one death of SLE patients every month at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital," she said.

According to her, ongoing awareness talks are being conducted, targeting not only the people but also the doctors.

"Generally, when one feels unwell,

having facial rashes, fever, joint pains, please consult a doctor so tests can be conducted to determine the cause," she said, adding that 90 per cent of the patients are female.

The event attracted some 400 participants including 70 SLE patients who walked 1.4 km along the jogging track at Perdana Park.

Dr Malehah said that some 150 people in Sandakan have also participated 'virtually' where they wore

the T-shirts, paid joining fee, and walked the same distance in Sandakan at the same time.

The participants walked with umbrellas to symbolise that SLE patients need to be protected from the sun as sunlight worsens the symptoms.

SLE is an autoimmune disease where the body's immune system attacks healthy tissues affecting skin, joints, kidney, brain and other organs.