

Public criticism driving Covid-19 patients to depression, says Sabah lecturer

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Prof Dr Murnizam Halik advises empathy and support to help patients improve their mental health

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Universiti Malaysia Sabah's Prof Dr Murnizam Halik says constant public criticism faced by Covid-19 patients can drive them to develop anxiety and depression. – The Vibes pic, October 4, 2020



BY
Rebecca Chong

SANDAKAN – Covid-19 patients can fall into depression due to criticism and taunts they get amid widespread fear over the pandemic, said Universiti Malaysia Sabah's Prof Dr Murnizam Halik.

Murnizam, who is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Psychology and Education, said criticism from people around a Covid-19 patient can worsen his or her mental condition, leading to anxiety and depression.

He added the best solution is to have empathy for each other.

“The society may react negatively. Some may feel sympathy. But society needs to have empathy, to understand the suffering and pain patients have to go through.

“People around Covid-19 patients can offer support too. Even though we cannot have physical contact, we can reach out to them through social media.

“As for patients, they should understand why society is avoiding contact with them. My suggestion is for people who know they have Covid-19 to own up and tell the people around them.

“Announce it on social media that they have Covid-19, that they are receiving proper treatment (if that is the case), and that they understand why people are reluctant to get physically close to them.

“It all depends on the individual. How well are they able to handle the pressure? They will need 100% support from family and friends,” he told The Vibes.

Murnizam’s comments came after a local teenage boy said he felt sad after receiving negative reactions after he was suspected to have Covid-19.

“People called me out for getting infected with Covid-19, and called me negative names,” said the teen.

The negative reactions were a result of a viral WhatsApp message that said 10 teenagers (with their names) have possibly been infected after hanging out on the fourth floor of a residential flat in Mile 7 here.

The teen said he had since received messages on WhatsApp and his social media accounts, criticising him for not staying at home as Covid-19 cases in Sabah are on the rise.

He is currently studying for his Diploma in Aquaculture at a local institution, but students have been told not to return to campus.

“We have to take online classes from Monday to Friday. To get the better internet reception, I have to be on the highest floor of my flat building.

“It was a coincidence that someone who is positive with Covid-19 was there. Ten of us were there that day. We were taken to Batu Putih quarantine centre on Friday and now waiting for our Covid-19 test results,” he told The Vibes.

“I wish people will stop judging me. I did not know my friend was positive (with Covid-19),” he said. –The Vibes, October 4, 2020