

NKF marks 50 years of good service

THE National Kidney Foundation (NKF) has just celebrated its 50th year (1969-2019) of service to Malaysians with kidney disease. To date, thousands of kidney failure patients have benefited from high-quality dialysis with affordable or even free treatment. Cumulatively over the years, close to 100,000 patients and their extended families were relieved of the catastrophic financial consequences of long-term dialysis and renal replacement therapy.

In his opening address at the 50th annual general meeting of the foundation, its president Tan Sri Abu Bakar described the success of NKF as the result of years of support from two pillars – the generosity and kindness of people from all walks of life, from big corporations to individuals, who donated cash, time and effort for the benefit of renal failure patients; and to a board of governors comprising various experts, nephrologists, lawyers, accountants, businessmen and former patients who worked tirelessly over the years, closely adherent to the aspiration of the foundation.

Their contributions won the unquestioning support and trust of the public, which in turn ensured the growth and sustenance of the institution.

Going one step further, public confidence in the operation of an organisation like NKF is also the basis of success in the formulation of our healthcare policy.

Our current healthcare scenario



is divided and unsustainable. On the public side, it is not possible, now or in future, to sustain a fully socialised healthcare provision without high taxation.

On the other hand, unregulated and oligopolistic competition of various stakeholders in the private market will result in intolerably expensive care such as what's happening in the United States.

In this regard, the only way forward would be a meaningful pub-

lic-private cooperation on the "foundation" that Bakar has enumerated for the NKF.

Health of the nation consists of a multitude of factors across many sectors. It requires input not only from medical but also various other professionals from all walks of life.

It is a "common" of the society which needs to be managed to the best ability of all participating members to bring maximum bene-

fits to everyone involved.

Competing interest and rivalry must be borne out by the common good and high standards. Monopolistic rivalry and market behaviour can only lead to additional cost and eventual harm to patients and stakeholders alike.

Because market share and profit are not a priority, NKF was able to create an environment where various categories of people were able to contribute to the common good without feeling exploited or oppressed.

Fairness and justice to the providers are the key elements not only to instil pride and honour to their toils but also to derive the best out of everyone involved. It was the ability of NKF to translate this concept of public good into action that ensured its long-term success.

For the donors, the single ringgit donated to the NKF is working far more than its face value.

Renal replacement therapy, by its power to determine life or death (you either pay for it or die), could have become a highly lucrative business in a free market.

It did not become so because charity contributions leveraged market pricing, allowing it to remain reasonable while the high standards continued to be maintained for the good of the patients.

Where the invisible hand of market mechanism fails, the conscience of the people helped to correct it. This market-modifying secondary effect thus benefits not only NKF patients but thousands

of others as well.

Over 80% of the funds were used to subsidise patient care. Significant investment into public health, preventive and social factors reduced the size of the demand pool and thus enabled high-quality treatment at low cost.

Most of these investments were risk-targeted and scientifically sound instead of populist screening programmes which are not cost-effective and may even be harmful in practice.

There is a lot that we can learn from this model in the formulation of our future healthcare policy for the nation.

A common mission to bring the best available to the patients, fair and just non-partisan cooperation, scientific and result-based management and appropriate use of market leverage to ensure long-term sustainable benefit to our patients must be incorporated in the formulation of our national healthcare policy.

Today, the NKF remains strong with a healthy balance sheet and appears indefinitely sustainable with an environment where people from all walks of life and differing expertise can work happily together for a common mission.

It is truly the largest non-profit medical organisation for kidney failure by the people, of the people and for the people in Malaysia.

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