

Better treatment for kidney patients

IN light of Budget 2023, under which the Health Ministry received the second largest allocation after the Education Ministry, the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) proposes that the government re-strategise the dialysis funding process to improve the health outcomes of patients, especially the poor and hardcore poor.

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), this demographic of the population has increased by 39.4% and 73.2%, respectively, between 2019 and 2021.

As of Dec 31, 2021, 49,770 patients had been diagnosed with end stage renal disease (ESRD) and are now under dialysis treatment. Of these, 48.1% are funded by the government, 23.2% by Socso and 12.2% by zakat/haitulmal. The rest are out-of-pocket, sponsored by NGOs or subsidised by employers.

Although the government funds almost 50% of dialysis treatment, the current subsidy values differ across various agencies, making it difficult for patients to receive consistent quality treatment.

The payment currently focuses on the cost of the actual haemodialysis procedure. This means patients must pay out-of-pocket for other necessary treatments such as vascular access procedures, oral medications, injections, laboratory tests and doctor consultations.

Based on NKF's internal data, the total cost for every haemodialysis treatment is about RM200. However, NGOs such as NKF are only reimbursed RM100-RM130 per treatment by certain government agencies.

NKF proposes that the government revisits the funding process and structure for haemodialysis by including all the necessary treatment required by the patients. These include erythropoietin-stimulating agents (ESAs) injection and parenteral iron therapy, treatment for mineral bone disease, and laboratory tests for disease monitoring.

It is paramount to subsidise these treatments to ensure that patients receive holistic and comprehensive care, a better prognosis, and longer life expectancy with the ability to return to work.

Treatment providers must also be compelled to meet certain performance/quality indicators. This would hold them accountable for achieving the desired patient out-

comes. Further discussion is warranted on this matter.

There is also an urgent need to review the overall funding strategy and allocation for other end-stage renal failure treatment modalities, namely peritoneal dialysis and kidney transplant.

NKF proposes adopting a society-wide approach when dealing with the nation's most vulnerable and under-served communities. It is imperative for all stakeholders – government departments, dialysis service providers, patient groups, NGOs and etc. – to work together towards building a more sustainable, comprehensive and inclusive funding strategy for the rakyat.

**NATIONAL KIDNEY
FOUNDATION OF MALAYSIA**