

'Focus more on mental health'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Mental- health education and promotion, which aim to address the rise of psychosocial problems in the society, are essential in Malaysia's aspiration to become a developed nation, National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health chairman, Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye said. "Promoting mental health requires joint efforts between the government and relevant non-governmental organisations as well as volunteers.

"A comprehensive community mental-health programme is, therefore, needed to encourage the community to be better informed about mental-health issues and how they can play an effective role in promoting mental health and helping the mentally ill," he said in a statement here yesterday.

In previous years, mental health was a low-priority topic for the government and the community compared with other health problems, but it was gaining more prominence, he said.

"We need to do more for those who suffer from mental illness.

"On the welfare service front, the government should include the mentally ill as disabled persons and accord them special privileges in employment to help them return to society and not be a burden to society."

According to Health Ministry statistics, 400,227 mental patients sought treatment in government hospitals last year, an increase of 15.6 per cent compared with 346,196 people in 2007.

He said the Third National Health and Morbidity survey in 2006 found that more teenagers suffered from mental health problems.

More than 19 per cent of the older age group (70 to 74 years old) and 14.4 per cent of the youngest (between 16 and 19 years old) were also more prone to having mental health problems than the rest of the group.

Mental illness was also more prevalent among females at 12.1 per cent compared with males at 10.4 per cent. -- Bernama

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