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KL to host HIV conference

SHARING EXPERTISE: Nobel laureate Prof Francoise Barre-Sinoussi among speakers

PUNITHA KUMAR

MALAYSIA will be the first Asian country to host the International AIDS Society (IAS) Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention.

The seventh edition of the conference will be held from June 30 till July 3.

Local co-chair of IAS 2013 and Centre of Excellence for Research in AIDS (CERiA) director Prof Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman said the event was the world's largest open scientific conference on HIV and AIDS. She said this represented an ideal platform for examinations and latest development in HIV-related research.

"This conference will enable scientists from all over the world to share their expertise and experience towards a common pursuit — to find a cure.

"But, this search for a cure will not be immediate, neither will it be tomorrow, nor in the next few years but we have hope. Currently, only a functional cure exists for the virus," she said at a media

briefing on the conference, organised by IAS in partnership with CERiA.

The conference is supported by the Health Ministry and Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau. Apart from discussing effective treatment and prevention methods, Dr Adeeba hoped the conference would spur interest in more local scientists getting involved in HIV-related research.

"CERiA, which is under Universiti Malaya, is the sole HIV research centre here and, with this conference, I hope more local experts will come forward and be actively involved in developing research," said Dr Adeeba, who is also Malaysian AIDS Council president.

On possible implementation derived from the conference, Health Ministry Disease Control Division senior principal assistant director Dr Anita Suleiman said the "Treatment as prevention" method would be "seriously taken into consideration".

"There is a possibility of implementing this method under the

Malaysia National Strategic Plan 2011-2015."

The new method, introduced by a United States study in 2011, confirmed that early diagnosis and treatment can reduce the possibility of transmission by 96 per cent.

Currently, HIV-research has managed to yield a functional cure, to which individuals would still have the virus but it will not affect their health and they will be able to live without the need for treatment.

The conference, to be held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, will be attended by 4,000 leading scientists, clinicians, public health experts and community leaders from around the world.

It is expected to generate about RM55.8 million in economic impact for Malaysia. Notable speakers include IAS president and Nobel laureate for her discovery of HIV French virologist Prof Francoise Barre-Sinoussi and HIV cure specialist Dr Steve Deeks.



Prof Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman (right) and general manager Sales and Marketing Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau **Ho Yoke Ping** at the media briefing on IAS 2013. Pic by Aziah Azmee