

INTIMATE ISSUES: TALK TO A DOCTOR

IN a society where talking about sex in public is taboo, men facing sexual problems find it difficult and embarrassing to seek medical attention. More often, they seek an alternative solution, which could lead to other health issues.

UKM Medical Centre consultant urologist and sexual medicine physician Associate Professor Dr Christopher Ho Chee Kong (photo) says people tend to think that sexual problem is not a disease but a social issue. Because of this, the awareness that it can be treated medically is lacking.

"Awareness on men's sexual dysfunction is low, especially in a conservative society like ours. We know men want treatment but they either don't know where to go, or are too embarrassed to see doctors. I think if it is not handled well, it will remain unresolved and if they seek alternative treatment, it could cause even more serious problems."

Dr Ho, who is the only sexual medicine physician in Malaysia, says the most common sexual problem in men is premature ejaculation, followed by erectile dysfunction. "Men do not realise that when they face these sexual problems, there could be underlying health issues causing them. Because of this, they need to see a medical professional who can prescribe the right treatment for them. Instead, they go on the Internet and buy all sorts of products that not only won't help their condition but could put their health in danger."

A number of biological factors may contribute to premature ejaculation, including abnormal hormone levels

and abnormal levels of brain chemicals called neurotransmitters.

The common underlying causes of erectile dysfunction include heart disease, clogged blood vessels (atherosclerosis), high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. It could also be due to depression and stress.

To improve knowledge and care for men's health in a primary care setting, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Medical Faculty recently organised a Men's Health Certification Course on The Quest Towards Improving Men's Health In Primary Care in Kuala Terengganu. About 25 primary care physicians took part in the two-day course, in collaboration with pharmaceutical company Menarini.

UKM Medical Centre senior consultant urologist Professor Dr Zulkifli Md Zainuddin says the four health issues covered during the course — premature ejaculation, erectile dysfunction, testosterone deficiency and benign prostatic hyperplasia — are neglected areas in men's health.

"That is the reason we held this course for the second time for primary care physicians. Many physicians are uncomfortable talking about it so they don't ask their patients if they could be suffering from sexual dysfunction. It is important that physicians are equipped with the knowledge for a more proactive approach when dealing with this issue. Patients do not need to see specialists as these four health problems can be managed by physicians."

