That unhealthy attitude

Getting men to pay more attention to their well-being is an uphill struggle even for doctors, writes Kasmiah Mustapha

Many doctors agree their male patients usually set foot in a medical centre when they are sick.

Lack of awareness of male health risks and a reluctance to go for medical screenings or talk about any symptom, even to their spouses, point to a general lackadaisical attitude towards their own well-being.

UKM Medical Centre senior consultant urologist Professor Dr Zulkifli Md Zainuddin says when men go to doctors, most already have advanced health problems.

Managing their health. And this is a worrying trend."

Sabah Jaya Medical Centre consultant urologist Dr Bala Sundaram Marlappan says from infancy up to old age, women are healthier than men, hands down. Out of the 16 leading causes of health-related deaths, men lead women in all except Alzheimer's disease, and that is because they don't live long enough to develop it.

"Men die five years earlier than women, on average. They put their health last and go to the doctor less than women and are more likely to have serious conditions when they go."

Dr Bala says there are several theories on why women are healthier than men. These include the country's policies that see more money spent on the healthcare needs for female children than men.

"And men, particularly older men, prefer to see a male doctor for intimate issues. But the primary care physician may be a female, so they refuse to go."

"Also, men are encouraged to appear tough and independent. Some men believe that visiting doctors or complaining about feeling ill threatens their masculinity."

Lung cancer is the second most common cancer affecting men. More than 90 per cent of lung cancers are due to the smoking habit.

Risk factors: According to the Malaysian National Cancer Society, it is the second most common cancer affecting men. More than 90 per cent of lung cancers are due to smoking tobacco. Smoking at a young age will increase the risk of developing lung cancer, and exposure to secondhand smoke could also increase the risk.

Preventive steps: Quitting smoking reduces the risk of developing or dying from cancer. Living a healthy lifestyle is also another preventive step against lung cancer. According to the Malaysian National Cancer Institute, people who quit smoking, regardless of age, are less likely than those who continue to smoke to die from smoking-related illnesses. Studies have shown that smokers who quit at 30 years old reduce their chance of dying prematurely from smoking-related diseases by more than 50 per cent.

People who quit at about 50 reduce their risk of dying prematurely by 50 per cent compared with those who continue to smoke. Even people who quit at about 60 or older live longer than those who continue the habit.