

## Cutting back on cutting up

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in non-emergency surgeries being reduced and surgeons being deployed to help out their physician colleagues.

By Dr HARDIP SINGH GENDEH

THE spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19 has caused a shift in the delivery of healthcare, both nationwide and across the globe.

This is especially due to the fact that this new coronavirus spreads easily through close contact with an infected person, including via the respiratory droplets generated when this person coughs or sneezes.

As healthcare institutions geared up to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, many sacrifices and significant changes were made to help cope with the anticipated overwhelming numbers of infected patients.

Frontline and critical care services are being prioritised as they are dealing directly with Covid-19 patients.

Many other healthcare services have slowed down or stopped if not urgent, including elective surgeries, in order to minimise potential exposure to Covid-19.

Indeed, many surgeons have been required to drop their scalpels and don their stethoscopes to assist in treating general medical problems during the past few months.

Many surgical officers and trainees have been sent to other departments in need, such as the Emergency Department, to help their colleagues.

However, essential or emergency surgical care is still being performed, although

such operations have to be carried out in a way that minimises risk to both patient and surgeon.

Health director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, who is also a senior consultant breast and endocrine surgeon at Hospital Putrajaya, says Health Ministry (MOH) hospitals have been categorised into three types for this pandemic:

- Covid-19 hospitals that only treat Covid-19 patients
- Hybrid Covid-19 hospitals that treat both Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 patients, and
- Non-Covid-19 hospitals that do not treat Covid-19 cases at all.

He notes that all emergency and semi-emergency surgeries in MOH hospitals have been proceeding as usual.

Hospitals designated for the sole treatment of Covid-19 patients had referred all their non-Covid-19 patients to nearby hybrid or non-Covid-19 hospitals as soon as they were classified as a Covid-19 hospital, and continue to do so for any non-Covid-19 patients that come their way.

Meanwhile, hybrid Covid-19 hospitals are treating all emergency surgical cases, while non-emergency surgeries are being considered on a case-by-case basis, depending how critical the condition is.

As for non-Covid-19 hospitals, it is business as usual for all emergency and non-emergency surgeries.

> TURN TO PAGE 3



Surgeons and an anaesthesiologist in full protective gear preparing to operate on a Covid-19 patient at a hospital in Moscow, Russia. — Bloomberg