

Elderly care deserves more focus

Standardised training needed as Malaysia becomes an ageing nation

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PETALING JAYA: It's important to establish standardised training programmes for caregivers and nursing homes across the nation to ensure high-quality care for the elderly, say experts.

Association for Residential Aged Care Operators (AgeCope) president Delren Terrence Douglas said a standardised syllabus is extremely important as it will better protect both carers and senior citizens.

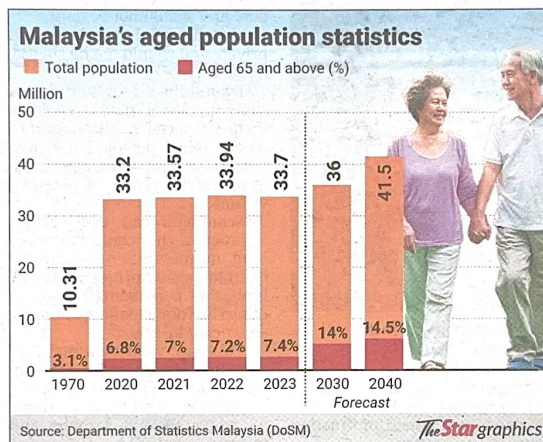
"There is no standardised syllabus nationwide for caregivers (currently), but there are a lot of trainers working in silos offering programmes, and the duration can be from weeks to months.

"Many claim that they are registered under the Human Resources Ministry (MOHR), so the MOHR should standardise it.

"We have been working for the last one year with a local university to come up with a standardised framework that is applicable to everyone," he said.

Delren's comments follow the announcement by Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri that the government will introduce the Care Industry Action Plan in July this year.

The minister said that, among



other issues, the plan will address the low number of caregivers in the country and aim to turn caregiving into a professional career as Malaysia moves towards becoming an aged nation by 2030.

Delren said a standardised training module will ensure better wages for caregivers, enabling them to do their jobs professionally.

"If the training is standardised, the wages offered can be higher than the minimum wage, maybe around RM1,750," he said.

He said few individuals show interest in pursuing careers in caregiving, adding that most are forced to enter the field due to being school dropouts or not being able to pursue higher education.

He also recommended setting up a database to safeguard caregivers and identify instances of elderly abuse, emphasising the importance of protecting both senior citizens and caregivers.

Santok Singh, who runs the Golden Peacock Nursing home in

Penang, said very few people are interested in becoming care workers, despite the fact that the nation has already been an ageing nation since 2021.

"The younger people do not want to do the job even when they are paid well and have better perks," he said, adding that they often perceive it as a difficult job.

Santok, who is also the AgeCope Penang chapter chairman, said care homes continuously reach out to students in nursing colleges and the Orang Asli community, but the majority are not keen on becoming carers.

Therefore, he said, the government must focus on engaging industry players to address the lack of caregivers in the country, especially since the number of senior citizens in Perak and Penang is increasing.

"We have been voicing and discussing since 2017 on this (ageing nation) issue with the local government and also with the Federal Government," he said.

Santok recommended reopening the quota for the care worker industry for foreign workers, suggesting it as a short-term solution to ensure care homes would have sufficient manpower.

"Until a better package is formalised by all stakeholders, we, the B40-category private care centres, desperately need the Federal

Government, particularly Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri, the Human Resources Ministry, as well as the Housing and Local Government Ministry, to listen to stakeholders to find a better solution to help cushion the ageing population," he said.

A carer, who only wanted to be known as Jamal, called on the government to revise the salaries of carers, saying that the current pay does not reflect the difficulty of the job.

"We can't get angry at the elderly because some of them have memory problems. Some of them can get violent, while others could get very depressed from time to time.

"This job is challenging us physically, mentally and emotionally.

"The current wage is also insufficient given the amount of work and issues that we have to face. Also, a better salary will attract more people to join this industry," he said.

Recent estimates from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) indicate a rise in the composition of individuals aged 65 and over, increasing from 7.2% in 2022 to 7.4% in 2023.

It is projected that by 2030, 14% of Malaysia's total population will be over the age of 65, and the figure is expected to go up to 14.5% in 2040.