

## Health Minister: Drug addicts need treatment and rehabilitation, not imprisonment



Drug addiction is a chronic disease that requires treatment and rehabilitation, not detention or imprisonment, said Health Minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa.

According to her, prison is not a place to treat drug addicts and this can impede them from functioning as productive members of society.

“Prison is not the last resort for educating individuals involved in drug abuse,” she said when officiating the Addiction and Forensic Psychiatry Symposium 2023 here today.

Dr Zaliha believed that a distinct approach from a public health standpoint was needed to provide treatment and rehabilitation to drug addicts.

She also admitted that there were many gaps and challenges that should be addressed between law enforcement and medical treatment for drug addicts.

Dr Zaliha said that in addition to a legal point of view, there were also challenges in rehabilitation centres, where drug addicts are struggling with symptoms of withdrawal syndrome or physical and mental illness due to drug addiction.

“This poses difficulties in formulating an effective treatment plan...this also prevents appropriate treatment and rehabilitation from being given and at the same time delays the legal process.

“As a result, the disease prognosis will worsen, and the court will become more congested,” she said.

She added that from a legal point of view, the legal system and treatment through a community-based approach can be the catalyst for the desired change. – Bernama