

Defining Long Covid could ease insurance process

PETALING JAYA: Now that the definition of Long Covid has been established, it may be easier for medical practitioners to carry out clinical practices and research.

Assoc Prof Dr Tan Toh Leong said the standardised definition would allow researchers to investigate the disease further.

He said it could also ease the insurance claims process if Long Covid is covered by policies as well as for the issuance of medical certificates to justify why a patient is unable to work.

It will also allow the government to determine budget allocations for hospitals, he said.

However, the Hospital Canselor Tuanku Muhriz, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Emergency Medicine senior consultant said that there is a flipside to defining the condition.

"It is too specific. Patients could be misdiagnosed or overdiagnosed for other diseases which display similar symptoms that jeopardise the management of other diseases," he said.

Assoc Prof Tan, who has handled Covid-19 cases, said Long Covid symptoms are similar to post-sepsis syndrome.

Post-sepsis syndrome refers to the continuing display of physical

and emotional symptoms after recovering from sepsis.

He said diseases with similar symptoms to Long Covid such as malaria, dengue and influenza could be placed under a single umbrella to make clinical management decisions and insurance claims easier.

Meanwhile, former health deputy director-general Datuk Dr Christopher Lee took to his X account to say that the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (Nasem) 2024 definition presented a core description, a list of characteristic symptoms and associated diagnosable conditions and seven important features.

"This provides some clarity and uniformity in Long Covid diagnosis," he said.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad, in a parliamentary written reply on March 5, said at least 7,606 patients underwent outpatient rehabilitation services for Long Covid at the ministry's facilities from 2020 to 2023.

He said in the first two years of the pandemic, 7,394 patients received structured interdisciplinary medical rehabilitation as outpatients for Long Covid care.

However, there was a significant decrease in 2023, with 212 patients undergoing medical rehabilitation, he added.

He said a total of 22 deaths were reported among Long Covid patients, referred to the Sungai Buloh Hospital Covid-19 rehabilitation outpatient specialised services, between November 2020 and September 2022.

However, Dzulkefly said, the cause of death was not directly linked to Covid-19 but involved other complications.