

Cater to needs of senior citizens in 2023 Budget

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LETTERS: The World Health Organisation said all countries will, in the not-too-distant future, face challenges to ensure that their health and social systems are ready for an ageing population.

In 1970, the number of those aged 60 and above in Malaysia was 5.2 per cent. Over the years, this figure has grown to 9.8 per cent.

Our population now stands at 32.7 million, of whom 3.3 million are aged 60 and above.

Other facts about the elderly are that they are also living longer, that women are living longer than men, and more and more are living in urban rather than rural areas.

These facts will have a significant impact on how the nation's resources are distributed and used for the management and integration of the elderly.

To provide these services, healthcare providers should acquire the knowledge, skills and tools to manage ageing issues.

We can take a cue from nations that have a long history of caring for the aged and infirm.

We know that Japan is the world's fastest ageing country.

It became an ageing society in 1970, then became an aged society in 1994 and is today a super-aged society. Nearly 30 per cent of the population there are aged 65 and over.

Of particular interest for us should be solutions based on technology and innovation, including the use of robots for contactless delivery and doing routine tasks.

We should also be interested in knowing about redistributing healthcare resources due to a change in the rural-urban demographic pattern.

Alzheimer's disease is a common problem afflicting the elderly and is estimated to affect at least five per cent of the population aged 65 and above.

This will have important implications for our resources.

All this is not to deny the fact that Malaysia has one of the better healthcare systems in the world, but, as we have seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, it may be quickly overstretched.

All these mean planning and budgetary provision. It is hoped that there will be a sufficient allocation for public healthcare in the 2023 Budget.

In the 2022 Budget, the government provided the Health Ministry with its second highest allocation. But, in real terms, was it enough?

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