

Blood and DNA tests for cancers

Liow: 'Sentinel principle' technology to be used in two-year trial

By **NG CHENG YEE**
chengyee@thestar.com.my

PUTRAJAYA: A two-year clinical trial will be conducted to develop diagnostic tests which can detect certain cancers using the patients' blood and DNA profiles.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said the "sentinel principle" technology - developed by private firm GeneNews Malaysia - would detect gene expression in the blood and match it to diseases such as nasopharyngeal or upper throat and liver cancers.

"This technology is based on the finding that up to 80% of the genes expressed in other tissues overlapped with those in our blood, suggesting that blood cells may provide information as to the health or the presence of disease in any particular tissue. "These biomarkers are then identified

by comparing them with the gene expression pattern in blood samples from both diseased and healthy individuals," he told reporters here yesterday.

Liow said the trial could help predict the risk of disease, provide early diagnosis and cut the cost of cancer treatment, particularly for liver cancer, which was mainly caused by Hepatitis B and common among Malaysians.

"Seventy-five per cent of chronic Hepatitis B carriers live in Asia and in Malaysia, while 80% of liver cancer patients only come forward to seek treatment at very late stages," he said, adding that the ministry would allocate RM5mil in research grant for the initial stage of the trial.

Liow said the project would also evaluate other blood-based test products which could detect biomarkers for colon cancer and pre-cancerous polyps.



For better health care: Liow explaining the 'sentinel principle' to reporters at his office in Putrajaya yesterday as Health Director-General Tan Sri Dr Ismail Merican (right) and GeneNews Richmond Hill's chief scientist Prof Dr Liew Choong-Chin listen.