

'2,144 SENIOR CITIZENS ABANDONED AT HOSPITALS'

914 have been returned to their family members, says Rina

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MORE than 2,000 senior citizens were abandoned at hospitals nationwide from 2018 to 2022.

Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Rina Mohd Harun, in disclosing the figure, said of the 2,144 neglected senior citizens, 914, comprising 656 men and 258 women, were successfully returned to their family members.

Rina said last year alone, 752 senior citizens were abandoned at hospitals by their family members, including 231 men and 109 women who had since been placed at welfare institutions, she added.

"Medical social workers at hospitals will continue to track down their next of kin. If unsuccessful, they will help arrange for placements (for the senior citizens) in either government or private welfare institutions.

"A total of 1,230 senior citizens — 650 men and 380 women — who are single and whose next of kin could not be traced, have been placed at welfare institutions.

"According to the Health Ministry, most cases involved senior citizens who do have spouses, children or siblings," she said in yesterday's parliamentary written reply.

Rina was responding to a question by Tan Kok Wai (Pakatan Harapan-Cheras), who asked the ministry to state the total of senior citizens abandoned at public and private hospitals in the last five years according to gender, reasons for abandonment and their new placements.

She said social workers would normally trace the senior citizens' next of kin by checking their identification cards, contacting the families, doing house visits or tracing them through the National Registration Department's system.

However, Rina, who is Titipwansa member of parliament, said in most cases, the next of kin who were traced would refuse to bring the senior citizens home.

"Among the reasons given were family problems and not having a steady job. Some even deny any knowledge of the senior citizens referred to them.

"The hospitals face difficulties when the senior citizens are unable to provide accurate information on their identity card number, phone number of next of kin, the identity of their friends or home address.

"In some cases, they (the abandoned senior citizens) are homeless and 'kutu rayau' (vagrants), who were sent to the hospital by members of the public.

"Those who were involved in drug and alcohol abuse are also referred to hospitals."

To address the issue, Rina said, the government had drafted the Senior Citizens Bill, which she said would protect the rights of senior citizens.

The draft of the bill was being examined by the relevant stakeholders.

Rumah Kasih Charity Home manager Foong Peng Lam said senior citizens were seen as troublesome and their families resorted to abandoning them at hospitals, under the impression that they would get the best care until they die.

After running Rumah Kasih, a subsidiary service of Kuala Lumpur Hospital (HKL), for 22 years, Foong said he had heard many unacceptable reasons given by families who refused to take their senior family members home.

He expressed his concern over the growing trend of senior citizens being left at the hospital, who would be referred to Rumah Kasih in Taman Setapak here.

Senior citizens would need round-the-clock care, he said,

and their families saw this as a burden.

"They shirk their responsibility by abandoning the old people at hospitals, even after they are fit to be discharged. They want hospitals to look after them until they die.

"When the hospital tries to call the families, they do not want to take the senior citizens home, especially the bedridden ones.

Some have given false contact numbers and they are not seen since.

"Some children abandon their parents due to past family problems. At the same time, the cost of sending them to nursing homes can go up to RM3,000 a month. So leaving them at hospitals seems like the best way out for these families. They should stop being irresponsible," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Foong also said the selfish act of these families had caused hospital wards to be choked and deprived other patients in need of treatment because an abandoned senior citizen who had nowhere to go would occupy a

hospital bed.

HKL, he said, would refer the abandoned old folks to Rumah Kasih to free up hospital beds for other patients.

"We will take them in after getting a referral letter stating the reasons of admission to the home, as well as their diagnosis as we need to send them to HKL for follow up treatments.

"We do all of this for free, but families fear they have to pay," said Foong.

Set up in 2000, Rumah Kasih now has 10 residents, some who are bedridden and stroke survivors. **Additional reporting by Hana Naz Harun**

Page 1 pic: A senior citizen making his way to the Komtar Bus Terminal in George Town yesterday.



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