

# INVEST MORE IN ELDERLY CARE, GOVT URGED

Call to have more doctors specialising in aged care, upgrade nursing homes

ARFA YUNUS  
AND QISTINA SALLEHUDDIN  
KUALA LUMPUR  
news@nst.com.my

**E**FFECTIVE and progressive measures must be taken to improve the nation's preparedness towards supporting and protecting the increasing ageing population in Malaysia.

Associate Professor of Psychology at Heriot-Watt University Malaysia Dr Zuhrah Beevi said these measures must include more investments in medical and psychological care for the elderly.

She said health issues and the empty nest syndrome, which could lead to depression, were serious problems affecting the elderly and this required prompt action by the government.

"Maybe it's not so much of an

issue now, but what happens when you think of the people who are retiring?

"They will lose the sense of focus in their lives because they were so used to working every day. When you lose that focus, it will affect your mental health. They will start feeling the empty nest syndrome because of loneliness and it will lead to depression.

"Measures must be taken very early. The government needs to start thinking about what will happen to us 30 or 40 years from now, and not wait until we are already there," she said.

Dr Zuhrah believed that the retirement age should be increased to 70 years old, depending on

the person's capability to work. "I understand that some people feel they can't wait for retirement because they have worked for decades and deserve a long hol-



Dr Zuhrah Beevi



Health issues and the empty nest syndrome, which can lead to depression, are serious problems affecting the elderly. FILE PIC

iday, but doing nothing will lead to mental health issues.

"Learning, on the other hand, will make you feel that life is exciting and that you have a sense of purpose again. Doing nothing could lead to dementia and depression, and this is common among older people."

She said seeking knowledge on a daily basis was an essential part of being human, which could also prevent dementia in old age.

"Let's say you're a teacher and when you were teaching, you had to read a lot to impart the knowledge to your students. But when you retire, you stopped reading and probably just watch television. This is when dementia creeps in and hence why being forgetful is common.

"But, it can be stopped and the best example I can give is (former

prime minister) Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (who is 97 years old). Do you see how (good) his memory is?

"It's because he is constantly working, which means his brain is used in its full capacity and, therefore, the probability of dementia could be reduced."

However, for the elderly who are unable to work, Dr Zuhrah said the country should invest in specialists with the necessary skills to care for the older generation.

She said doctors who specialised in aged care needed to be increased, adding that nursing homes must also be empowered.

Dr Zuhrah said since there were cases where the children would refuse to care for their parents, nursing homes with updated facilities and activities would significantly reduce depression and

other health issues among senior citizens.

"There is evidence from many countries that older people have minimal health issues because they are prepared to face their ageing society by taking early measures before it becomes a problem.

"The government needs to invest more in the medical sector. Allocate a budget to get more specialists. We need these because when the older generation increases, it also means that the younger population is decreasing.

"Our country is not ready to deal with an ageing population. It's not about whether we can do it. It's about whether or not we want to do it now. Since we already know what will happen in the future, action should be taken now."