

A cold line between life and death



PETALING JAYA: In an environment where bacterial growth and infections can spell the difference between survival and death, air-conditioning plays a vital role, say doctors.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Ashok Philip said that in general, intensive care units (ICUs) should be kept as clean as possible since patients there were seriously ill and could easily get infections.

He said he could not comment on the specifics of the problems at Kuantan's Hospital Tengku Ampuan Afzan as he was not aware of the situation there, but added that infection was a major concern when air-conditioning was affected.

"If windows are open, this may allow flies to enter, which can lead to infections," he said following complaints from visitors that the air-conditioning system at the hospital in Kuantan had failed and had even affected the ICUs.

Moreover, he said, doctors and nurses had to wear gowns when carrying out procedures in the ICU.

"Imagine the sweat dripping on to a patient while a doctor is performing a procedure – this can also cause infections," he said.

Dr Ashok said that although the problem was manageable, fragile patients might face unnecessary problems.

"Thus, repair work should be done as soon as possible," he said.

Consultant interventional radiologist Dr Alex Tang said air-conditioning was very important, especially in several critical areas in a hospital such as the ICU operation theatres.

"It helps in controlling the temperature, humidity and sterile filtration, as well as facilitating a clean and hygienic environment."

Besides the discomfort, faulty air-conditioning could also give rise to issues relating to infection control, he added.