

# NGOs laud ministry's efforts as a win for public health

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## NATION

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PETALING JAYA: NGOs are happy that patients can now be cured of Hepatitis C after the Government issued a compulsory licence to gain access to the effective drug.

Third World Network (TWN) programmes director Chee Yoke Ling said it welcomed this long-awaited day when Malaysians who needed affordable Hepatitis C treatment could finally be cured.

She said the great efforts of the Health Ministry over several years had achieved a victory for public health.

"Malaysia is now able to buy generic sofosbuvir at one of the lowest prices in the world.

"We call on the Government to provide sufficient budget to scale up treatment so that everyone who needs it will get it," said Chee yesterday.

TWN also urged the authorities to expand the availability of treatment to university hospitals under the Education Ministry.

Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi) South-East Asia regional office head Jean-Michel Piedagnel said no other country in the world went as far in providing life-saving Hepatitis C treatment to all.

"It shows that public political leadership is essential in promoting access to healthcare. Proud to be part of the team," he said.



DNDi is an international non-profit drug research and development organisation, of which the Health Ministry is a founding member.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Ravindran R. Naidu said the free Hepatitis C treatment was a step in the right direction.

“However, at present, treatment is only in government hospitals and the patients have to be carefully selected,” he said, adding that the free treatment would initially be available only in 18 government hospitals nationwide.

Positive Malaysian Treatment and Advocacy Group director Edward Low also agreed that the move to make Hepatitis C treatment free was a good start.

“We hope this treatment programme is able to expand to the primary healthcare centres like district clinics because the oral medicines are easy to monitor by trained physicians,” said Low when contacted.

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