

Roping in men to fight breast cancer

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KUALA LUMPUR: When Nik Hasnah Che Haron discovered that she had breast cancer, her greatest fear was that her husband would leave her.

But her fears proved unfounded. Not only did her husband, Nik Kamil Nik Mohamed, 58, stand by her, he also accompanied her to every treatment following her lumpectomy in 1995.

Today, Nik Kamil continues to stand by his wife as the couple share their experience at various health talks.

He said he felt obliged to ensure that men understand the predicament faced by women who were suffering from breast cancer — the Number One killer among women in Malaysia after cervical cancer.

"At times, the women we talked to did not believe that my wife had gone through surgery and treatment. My wife would bare her breasts to convince them and I admire



Nik Kamil (left) and his wife, breast cancer survivor Nik Hasnah Che Haron, attend talks to share their experience regularly.

her for that show of courage." Nik Kamil is not the only man helping to raise awareness about breast cancer.

Self-employed Abdul Jalil Alimon of Malacca has remained his wife's staunchest supporter as she battles the disease.

Abdul Jalil said cancer was

just an illness and those suffering from it should not be afraid to seek treatment.

Nik Kamil and Abdul Jalil's testimonies and other heart-warming stories have been compiled into a book entitled "His and Her Story", launched by Women, Family and Community Development Minister

Datin Dr Ng Yen Yen on Friday.

The book, which was compiled by pharmaceutical company Pfizer Malaysia Sdn Bhd and National Council of Women's Organisation (NCWO), is a follow-up to the "MenCare" programme initiated by both parties two years ago.

The book is distributed free by NCWO and Pfizer, and efforts are also being made to publish it in Malay, Mandarin and Tamil to reach out to more men, especially husbands of women with breast cancer, and to encourage them to join the MenCare programme.

The MenCare or "Male Support of Breast Cancer Screening for Women" is an ongoing awareness campaign that aims to create and increase awareness and participation of men on issues related to breast cancer.

Dr Ng said it was important to engage men in the fight against breast cancer as many women chose to remain silent for fear of losing their husbands.

This, she said resulted in women not going for regular check-ups or mammogram, although the government subsidised the cost of a mammogram at 50 clinics appointed by the National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN) nationwide.

According to the LPPKN re-

port, only 53 per cent of women went for breast check-ups.

The percentage is only a slight increase from 12 years ago when only 47 per cent of women did breast examination.

The National Cancer Registry (NCR) recorded 3,738 new cases of breast cancer in 2003. The NCR also reported that one in 19 women in Malaysia was at risk of breast cancer.

NCR's survey also shows that cumulatively, one in 14 Chinese women is at risk, followed by one in every 14 Indian women and one in every 24 Malay women.

Dr Ng said her ministry would be setting up an informal task force next month to bring all agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private healthcare institutions under one roof.

The task force, she said would ensure coordination in the activities organised by these parties, and ensure greater participation and awareness on breast cancer.