

Glaucoma hits the young

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Kuala Lumpur: The government is concerned that more young people are suffering from glaucoma. Previously, the disease usually affected people above 45, but now even those in their early 20s and 30s are afflicted.

Deputy Health Minister Datuk Rosnah Rashid Shirlin blamed this on today's lifestyle and heavy strain on the eyes.

She said 1.8 per cent of the country's total population of 27 million were suffering from glaucoma. "In 2008, a total of 1,269 Malaysians sought treatment for glaucoma at government hospitals while 7,238 went to specialist centres."

Rosnah was speaking at a press conference after opening the World Glaucoma Society (MGS) yesterday.

She said awareness of the disease was lowest among Malaysians compared with people in Southeast Asian countries, adding that 70 percent of them did not even know what glaucoma was. Rosnah said nine government hospitals were equipped to treat glaucoma. She said in 2008, 68 million people worldwide were diagnosed with the disease and the World Health Organisation estimated that the number would rise to 88 million by 2020.

MGS president Stevens Chan, who is partially blind due to glaucoma said many people did not notice their vision loss until 40 per cent or more of their optic nerve had been damaged. He said routine eye examination was crucial to detect glaucoma and early detection and treatment could help control the progression of the disease and preserve vision.

MGS also carried out eye examinations in 15 other areas in the Klang Valley, including Bangsar, Puchong and Subang, to raise awareness of the disease.