NEW STRAITS TIMES

Five Malaysian hospitals to become 'sandbox sites' to test medical, healthcare tech [NSTTV]

KUALA LUMPUR: Five hospitals in Malaysia will be designated as sandbox sites for startup companies and solution providers to test-bed medical and healthcare technologies.

Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin said the five hospitals include the National Cancer Institute Putrajaya and Putrajaya Hospital in Putrajaya, Tunku Azizah Hospital in Kuala Lumpur, Bera Hospital in Pahang, and Rembau Hospital in Negri Sembilan.

"One reason why is simply the potential of the healthcare market. Another is that too much money is being spent on the curative side of healthcare.

"We need to shift some of that investment into keeping people healthy.

"By the time people come to hospitals, they are already chronically ill, and it would be much better for any country to have preventive and promotive health strategies, and technology helps with this."

Khairy was speaking at the launch of the Health Technology Hub at the Malaysian Research Accelerator for Technology and Innovation (MRANTI) Park here, today.

He said the Health Ministry and the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry had created the test-bed environment through the National Technology and Innovation Sandbox (NTIS), which would provide the initial funding for companies and startups to commercialise their healthcare technology solutions.

The common frustration among such companies, he added, was the stringent regulatory processes that they had to follow.

"It has to be a highly-regulated sector because it is a matter of life and death, and that is why we have all sorts of legislation and monitoring agencies related to healthcare.

"Having said that, these legislations and institutions must not stand in the way of innovation but facilitate innovation through the sandbox.

"Something that has not been registered yet can be deployed in a safe and controlled environment at our hospitals."

Khairy said he was confident that the Health Technology Hub and its innovations would improve public healthcare services, not only in the delivery of medical and clinical care, but also in hospital support.

He said for example, robots had been used in hospitals to send out food to sick patients during the Covid-19 pandemic to minimise human-to-human contact.

"Some of the menial tasks can be replaced by robotics. We are also in the process of digitalising our hospitals, especially in developing electronic medical record systems," added Khairy.

Meanwhile, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba said progress and focus on the health technology sector has the potential to fill in the gaps of quality healthcare and meet the growing needs of the nation.

He said therefore, proper focus should be given to the development and transformation of this sector.

"Digital healthcare plays a big role in revolutionising the treatment of various types of diseases.

"Many local health technology companies have explored new approaches in delivering diagnostic tests, medical assistance, healthcare and therapeutic treatment directly to patients."

Adham said the NTIS Health Technology Hub would be joined by the MRANTI integrated healthcare cluster, covering an area of 4.04ha in MRANTI park.

"This functions as a one-stop centre to accelerate the implementation of highly innovative projects in various fields, including medicine and healthcare.

"The total gross floor area of this development is about 873,000 sq ft and will be supported by state-of-the-art infrastructure, including a holistic technology ecosystem such as 5G, hyperscale data centres, learnscape parks and low-density development environments."

Adham said the MRANTI integrated healthcare cluster included a research and development centre, an artificial intelligence tech hospital, and a recuperation and rehabilitation village.

The cluster, he added, would be fully supported by the MRANTI Park ecosystem.

At the event, both ministers also saw a memorandum of understanding inked between MRANTI and Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) to ensure, among others, that both entities would provide access to research and innovation development and solutions for healthcare, and making the UiTM hospital as a physical testing facility for validation tests as well as a training centre for healthcare-related innovations and solutions.