

Heart health: Building a future of hope through advocacy

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ABSTRACT

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death in Malaysia and across Asia, with Malaysians experiencing onset much earlier than Western and many other populations. This early risk, driven by diet, stress, smoking, and sedentary lifestyles, demands urgent action. While prevention is possible, individual choices are not enough—advocacy, with a holistic approach, is key to turning awareness into meaningful change. This presentation, Heart Health: Building a Future of Hope Through Advocacy, explores how advocacy strengthens the fight against heart disease. It requires communities, policymakers, healthcare systems, and families to function as co-stakeholders to achieve impactful outcomes. Key strategies include promoting balanced diets such as Suku Suku Separuh, encouraging daily activity, and reducing smoking and vaping. For patients, advocacy means affordable follow-ups, clear medical pathways, and wider access to cardiac rehabilitation, while also recognizing the vital role of families and caregivers especially in terms of emotional support. Caregivers are often overlooked and face stress, burnout, thus increasing health risks themselves. Advocacy must therefore extend to caregiver training, support networks, and respite care. Incentives such as workplace wellness initiatives, insurance discounts, and subsidies for healthier foods can further encourage healthier lifestyles. Education, starting in schools, remains essential to nurture lifelong sustainable habits. Finally, the presentation situates advocacy within the Asian context—where strong family ties, cultural foods, and religious institutions can be leveraged for impact. By respecting traditions while promoting healthier practices, advocacy can drive sustainable change. Together, these efforts offer hope for reducing the CVD burden and building a healthier Malaysia and Asia.

Keywords: Heart health advocacy