

Boost efforts to make our own drugs

MALAYSIA's healthcare system is facing challenges with the increasing cost of medicine.

The government expenditure on healthcare alone was RM1 billion or 3.6 per cent of the national budget in 1983 and 3.8 per cent in 2001.

In 1995, the government spent more than RM200 million to procure drugs for public hospitals, which has now increased to RM800 million annually.

The potential that exists in the pharmaceutical industry should be tapped. As an example, "halal" pharmaceutical products are gaining due to increasing demand among the 2.1 billion Muslim population worldwide.

Our local entrepreneurs should aim to invest in and support halal products, particularly gelatin and other pharmaceutical products.

(Excipient is a pharmacologically inactive substance formulated with the active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) of a medication).

Seaweed extract, for example, is able to produce the plant-based gelling material and capsules needed for pharmaceutical drugs.

The government has started initiating programmes to boost the pharmaceutical industry.

For example, Universiti Malaysia



The potential that exists in the pharmaceutical industry should be tapped.

Pahang has begun to offer a new programme — Pharmaceutical Technology.

The objective is to supply the trained and skilled manpower needed to boost Malaysia's pharmaceutical industry.

To drive and accelerate the pharmaceutical industry, a smart co-operation between well-established industries worldwide and local entrepreneurs or government-linked companies should

be initiated.

The expertise of sharing and mentoring can be achieved between the two parties through profit-sharing agreements. Local nutraceutical companies should also diversify their products.

The companies should replicate the "research contract" concept applied by billion-dollar multinational pharmaceutical companies such as Glaxo Smith Kline, Pfizer, Abbot and Astrazeneca.

They have specific allocations for research and development collaboration with universities in the United States, United Kingdom and European countries.

These industries' goal is that the research contracts would be able to improve the desired properties of their final product such as its purity, solubility, efficacy and bio-availability.

Special grants should also be awarded to local universities to de-

velop the entrepreneurship with special and smart strategic planning and implementation. Local university multidisciplinary expertise should be integrated to contribute in each stage of the drug development to the final stage of commercialisation.

Malaysia should learn from the success of countries such as Switzerland, Germany and India in the development and commercialisation of pharmaceutical products.

We should also learn from the success of South Korea to catalyse the local pharmaceutical industry.

Our local resources should be turned to wealth and health.

At present, the gadget industry is accelerating rapidly with the development of new gadget models and technology spawning in the market to feed the demand for such products.

Nevertheless, when faced with extreme conditions such as war, natural disaster or a pandemic outbreak, the gadgets will not be of interest.

But the pharmaceutical industry will be important and increase its production to fulfil the consumer's needs.

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