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Alarming knowledge gap when it comes to diabetes

THERE is an alarming knowledge gap when it comes to diabetes, suggested a new diabetes awareness study.

Some 30% of Asian women who are or were pregnant in the past three years, for example, are unaware of the risk of developing gestational diabetes in pregnancy. The same study also found that seven births in Asia are affected by gestational diabetes.

The prevalence of diabetes is a growing health challenge in the region, according to the Financial Asia Diabetes Awareness Study.

Across the region, the study noted that Malaysia leads with the highest percentage of prevalence of diabetes in Asia at 17.9%, followed by Hong Kong and the Philippines at 9.6% and 6.9% respectively.

Also, 31% of respondents in the region do not even know there is more than one type of diabetes. The survey found that 42% of the

people spoken to are not aware that pregnant women have a higher risk of developing diabetes.

"The study aims at bridging the knowledge gap and promoting positive perception change towards diabetes, helping people live healthier lives — both physically and mentally, in addition to achieving lifetime financial security," said Sun Life Financial Asia Services Ltd CMO Jeremy Young in a statement.

The study was commissioned by Sun Life Financial Inc, an international financial services organisation. Commenting on the findings, Sun Life Malaysia Assurance Bhd CEO/president Raymond Lew said as evidenced by Malaysians' perception of diabetes, more efforts should be devoted to address the issue.

He said: "The company has been working with the Malaysian Diabetes Association to

provide financial sponsorships of diabetes monitoring supplies to diabetic children and adults from underprivileged families, and will continue our efforts to do so."

The survey also found that respondents believe diabetes decreases life expectancy by 19 years on average (Malaysia: 18 years; Hong Kong and Indonesia: 16 years; Vietnam: 11 years; the Philippines: 33 years), when in fact, the average is between 10 and 12 years, showing a significant gap between perception and reality.

Besides that, the survey unveiled that one third of the respondents do not know that most cases of type 2 diabetes are preventable. Although diabetic respondents surveyed portrayed a better knowledge about diabetes myths compared to the general population, 50% of them also misunderstood that the disease is curable.

Some 45% of the respondents think that

diabetes is a cost burden on public healthcare systems.

On average, respondents across the region estimated that a person with diabetes has to pay approximately RM7,508 for treatment every year.

"As medical cost continues to increase, the alarming prevalence of diabetes in Asia will continue to put economic burden on the public healthcare systems, as well as on diabetics and their families," said Young.

The study revealed the public's bias towards diabetics and strong associations with unfavourable characteristics, such as dangerous driving (37%), laziness (38%), lack of energy (62%), not being athletic (43%) and having mood swings (43%). Malaysia and Indonesia particularly see a higher percentage, 73% and 71% respectively, assuming that diabetics lack energy, according to the statement. — TMR