

The Importance of Volunteer Assistance for Cancer Patients

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Cancer is a disease that can bring significant impacts on social, economic, psychological and spiritual aspects. There has been an increase in the cases and death rates of cancer, both globally and nationally, even in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Irene Marcellina Sunarsih, Vice Chairman I of Yogyakarta Branch Indonesian Cancer Foundation, explained that the most common type of cancer is breast cancer. The condition of breast cancer patients are concerning because many of them come to get medical treatment at an advanced stage.

"Many patients delay medical treatment for various reasons and attempt on seeking non-medical care," said Irene at the Faculty of Medicine, Public Health and Nursing UGM.

Therefore, Irene commented, it is necessary to find out the causes of delaying medical treatment by breast cancer patients. Additionally, a volunteer guideline is important for assisting breast cancer patients as a form of assistance model development, so that the patients will immediately seek medical treatment in the proper way.



During the public examination of Doctoral Program of Faculty of Medicine, Public Health and Nursing UGM, Irene revealed several causes of delaying medical treatment by the patients, namely fear, the lack of knowledge about cancer and its symptoms. Furthermore, patients are also affected by myths, culture, skepticism toward doctor's diagnosis, doctor's service, as well as health care and treatment costs.

"They only believe in alternative medical treatment and rely on a mere prayer. We retrieve the data from 20 informants and as many as 19 people seek non-medical treatment first," said Irene.

According to Irene, the volunteer guidelines for assisting breast cancer patients have been processed with Delphi, evaluated and approved by volunteers. With the guidelines, it is expected to help the volunteers in supporting cancer patients.

"This is why the government and non-governmental organizations need to improve counseling about the prevention of cancer and SADARI (Breast Self-Exam). Early detection of cancer should be improved as well with a cheaper cost. Meanwhile, patients should no longer delay medical treatment to prevent the disease from getting worse," said Irene during her doctoral dissertation defense, *Postponement of Medical Treatment by Breast Cancer Patients: A Study for the Preparation of Volunteer Guidelines*.

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