



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Raising awareness of the role of genetics in the management of cancer risk**

*Malaysian cancer partners join forces to host the 15<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of the Psychosocial Aspects of Hereditary Cancer, for the first time in Asia.*

**SUBANG JAYA, 25 Sep 2017:** Malaysian Oncological Society (MOS), Cancer Research Malaysia (CRM) and University Malaya (UM) hosted the 15<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of the Psychosocial Aspects of Hereditary Cancer (IMPAHC) from 24–26 September 2017. First held in Asia, the IMPAHC 2017 aimed at raising awareness of the appropriate use of genetics in the management of cancer risk.

Scientists have identified more than 100 genetic loci (gene locations on chromosomes) that are associated with an increased risk of cancers. These new findings are expected to lead to more accurate methods of identifying individuals with higher risk of cancer, thus allowing for timely screening and prevention that could save patients' lives.

However, there remains numerous gaps in knowledge and understanding about genetics and the access to genetic counselling as well as genetic testing, especially in Asia. Recognising this challenge, MOS, CRM and UM are working together to heighten the awareness level amongst healthcare professionals on genetics and how it can be appropriately used to benefit cancer patients.

**Professor Dr Teo Soo-Hwang, Chief Executive of CRM** remarked, "It is estimated that one in 500 to one in 1,000 Malaysian women have inherited a gene that puts them at increased risk of breast cancer, but more than 90% of these women are currently unaware of their genetic status. Through genetic counselling and testing, it was discovered that individuals with variants in the *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* gene may benefit from a different treatment if they are diagnosed with ovarian cancer. While there is emerging evidence that this is also true for breast and prostate cancer, there is currently limited access to genetic counselling and testing which resulted in the lack of awareness on the availability of these services.

"Working together with MOS and UM for the IMPAHC 2017, we are honoured to be given the opportunity to bring together an eminent panel of speakers from the United Kingdom, Netherlands, United States and Australia to raise awareness about the developments in this area, which further serves as a testament to our effort to enable equitable access to genetics screening for the public and help men and women make informed choices in managing their risk of cancer," she continued.

"As a global community, we are making significant progress in improving survival from cancer, and a major way forward is to ensure that men and women know their risks so that they can

take the appropriate steps for prevention and screening,” said **President of MOS, Dr Matin Mellor Abdullah**. “As an association representing the oncologists in Malaysia, we continue to raise awareness of cutting edge technologies. This is particularly important as there are many genetic tests available and continuous training is necessary to ensure that all healthcare professionals are able to distinguish between tests which are hype, and tests which are clinically relevant that can truly help patients and their families,” Dr Matin added.

**Professor Dr Nur Aishah Mohd Taib, Consultant Breast Surgeon at UM** said, “we have been working closely with CRM to run special clinics to help families understand their risk of cancer and access the appropriate preventative and screening strategies. Our research is focused on developing tools that can help families with BRCA variants cope with their knowledge about their genetic status, and empower them to take necessary actions. Bringing IMPAHC to Malaysia helps us ensure that there is continued awareness of the advances in the field within the medical community in Malaysia as well as Asia.”

**Ms Yoon Sook-Yee, Head of Familial Cancer Research at CRM and Chairman of the local organising committee** remarked, “our nationwide study of genetic counselling for ovarian cancer patients has provided us with the platform to introduce the service to more centres in Malaysia. However, there is still a huge stigma surrounding cancer and the fear of discrimination of a genetic status is known. Hence, through this conference, we have highlighted the latest advances in managing the psychosocial aspects of hereditary cancer which is a major step towards improving access to potentially lifesaving information for families affected by cancer.”

Professor Dr Teo Soo-Hwang summarised, “we are very proud that MOS, UM and CRM have been given the privilege of working with the IMPAHC International Committee to host the 15<sup>th</sup> IMPAHC meeting in Malaysia and look forward to continued partnerships to enable appropriate use of genetics in enabling precision medicine so that we can save more lives from cancer.”

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### **About Cancer Research Malaysia**

Cancer Research Malaysia (CRM) is an independent, non-profit cancer research organisation in Malaysia. Dedicated to bringing scientific advancement to cancer patients, CRM leads the fight to reverse cancer and conducts impactful research to identify better ways to prevent, diagnose, detect and cure cancer for Malaysians. CRM is committed to ensuring that at least 90% of funds received are spent on research and works closely with top scientists and clinicians both locally and internationally.

CRM connects with the world through its website [www.cancerresearch.my](http://www.cancerresearch.my) and [www.facebook.com/cancerresearchmalaysia](https://www.facebook.com/cancerresearchmalaysia).

For further information on this news release or to explore opportunities to volunteer, fundraise, advocate or partnering with CRM as a CSR-of-Choice, please contact:

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