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No Woman Left Behind: NORA Brings Hope and Access to Cancer Care

Kuala Lumpur, 17th October — Cancer Research Malaysia (CRM) today introduced NORA, short for *Navigation, Outreach & Resource Access*, at a media roundtable in Kuala Lumpur Gold & Country Club. The session, hosted by Professor Dr Cheong Sok Ching, Chief Scientific Officer of CRM, brought together representatives from the Ministry of Health (MOH), partner hospitals, and members of the media to discuss the future of patient navigation in Malaysia.

Born out of a decade of collaboration between CRM, MOH, and public hospitals, NORA builds on the success of the Patient Navigation Programme (PNP). A pioneering initiative that helps women overcome barriers to timely cancer diagnosis and treatment. The programme offers structured, one-to-one guidance for patients from the moment of diagnosis through treatment and follow-up, addressing common challenges such as financial hardship, logistical issues, and fear of treatment.

Developed through CRM's evidence-based research, NORA represents Malaysia's first nationwide patient navigation model. Since its pilot in 2015 at Hospital Tengku Ampuan Rahimah (HTAR), Klang, the programme has expanded to 18 public hospitals, supporting more than 5,000 newly diagnosed breast cancer patients and reaching over 20,000 families. The initiative has been recognised by the World Health Organization (WHO) as an example of person-centred cancer care that reduces inequities, improves access to treatment, and enhances survival outcomes.

The name NORA captures the programme's expanded mission to guide, support, and empower patients at every step of their cancer journey:

- Navigation: guiding patients through diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.
- Outreach: engaging communities to promote early detection.
- Resource Access: connecting patients with financial, emotional, and logistical support.

Professor Dr Cheong Sok Ching, Chief Scientific Officer of CRM said, "NORA represents a clearer, stronger purpose. We wanted a name that patients and partners can easily recognise and connect with. One that reflects putting patients at the heart of our work and reflective of Malaysia's commitment to accessible cancer care. NORA brings these elements together to ensure that no woman is left behind in her cancer journey."

Dato' Dr Imi Sairi, National Head of Service for Breast & Endocrine Surgery added, "We are delighted to be collaborating with Cancer Research Malaysia on NORA where improvements in treatment adherence and reduction in delays in care are clearly seen. Through this partnership, we are ensuring that every woman, regardless of background or location, receives the care and support she deserves."

The programme is supported by Yayasan PETRONAS and Yayasan Sime Darby, whose contributions have enabled its expansion and long-term impact. NORA now stands as a scalable model of patient navigation that can be implemented to guide newly diagnose breast cancer patient to complete lifesaving treatment.

The launch, held in conjunction with Pink October, marked a key milestone in CRMY's ongoing mission to make cancer care accessible, equitable, and compassionate for all Malaysians.

To see how NORA has touched lives, meet Arbiah. A survivor from Kelantan whose strength and story continue to inspire many: <https://www.cancerresearch.my/why-arbiah-calls-cancer-a-gift-a-survivors-message-of-hope-from-kelantan/>

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About Cancer Research Malaysia

Established in 2000, Cancer Research Malaysia (CRM) is the country's first and only independent and non-profit cancer research organisation. Funded entirely by donations and research grants, it conducts cancer research to find better ways to improve survival, focusing on Asians.

In the breast cancer research programme, CRM has led the first and most comprehensive study building a risk-stratified approach for screening in Asian women, which allows more efficient and equitable screening and prevention to Asian women at higher risk of breast cancer. In addition, CRM has led the largest study of genomic profiles of Asian breast cancers, which provides critical insights into treatment and survival in Asian women.

This has led directly to the development of the first investigator-led clinical trial to test new therapies in Asian breast cancer patients.

Since 2014, CRM has also established a nurse and community-led programme which has transformed the cancer care underserved Malaysian breast cancer patients.

Cancer Research Malaysia's work is entirely supported by grants and donations, which can be made at www.cancerresearch.my/donate.

About NORA (Navigation, Outreach & Resource Access)

In Malaysia, delays in seeking and receiving breast cancer care remain a major barrier to survival. Many women postpone medical consultation due to fear, stigma, and lack of awareness, resulting in late-stage presentation. Belief in traditional or alternative therapies further contributes to treatment delay. Socioeconomic challenges including financial hardship, limited transportation, and inadequate social welfare support also hinder timely access to diagnosis and continuity of treatment. These combined factors highlight that improving survival requires not only medical advancements but also social and systemic interventions that enable women to seek and complete care without delay.

To address these challenges, Hospital Tengku Ampuan Rahimah (HTAR) in Klang, in collaboration with Cancer Research Malaysia (CRM), launched a pilot Patient Navigation Programme (PNP) in 2015. Within MOH hospitals, this programme is implemented through Pink Ribbon Centres (PRCs) dedicated one-stop centres that serve as the operational hubs for NORA. These centres integrate clinical navigation, social welfare support, and psychosocial services under one roof, enabling patients to move seamlessly from diagnosis to treatment and follow-up care. Following its success, the Ministry of Health Malaysia and CRM expanded the programme in 2019 to three additional state referral hospitals, reaching more breast patients across the country.

Recognised by the World Health Organization (WHO) on October 2024 as an effective model of person-centred care, the programme has since evolved into a nationwide initiative known as NORA (Navigation, Outreach & Resource Access) reflecting its expanded mission to not only navigate patients through treatment but also to strengthen community outreach and connect patients to essential resources. Moving forward, CRM aims to expand NORA's reach and position it as a lasting model for equitable cancer care for women across Malaysia.



From left to right: Professor Dr Cheong Sok Ching, Chief Scientific Officer of CRMY, Hani Zainal, Nurse Navigator for Community Outreach, Dato' Dr Imi Sairi, National Head of Service for Breast & Endocrine Surgery and Dr Jananezwary Kanapathy, Head of Community Outreach CRMY at the NORA Media Roundtable



From left to right: Professor Dr Cheong Sok Ching, Chief Scientific Officer of CRMY, Hani Zainal, Nurse Navigator for Community Outreach, Dato' Dr Imi Sairi, National Head of Service for Breast & Endocrine Surgery and Dr Jananezwary Kanapathy, Head of Community Outreach CRMY



From left to right: Maheswari Jaganathan, Deputy Head of Community Outreach CRMY, Hani Zainal, Nurse Navigator for Community Outreach, Dr Anita Baghawi, Breast and Endocrine Surgeon, Andy Khoo, Chief Executive Officer CRMY, Dr Jananezwaray Kanapathy, Head of Community Outreach CRMY and Kavitha Muniandy, Senior Community Navigator for Community Outreach