

## NEWS RELEASE

### **Deputy Prime Minister Launches Revolutionary R.O.S.E. Solution to Accelerate Drive Towards Cervical Cancer Elimination In Malaysia.**

***Women-centered, technology-driven screening approach set to strengthen national cervical cancer prevention & control programme.***

Kuala Lumpur, January 14, 2019 – Soon, more women in Malaysia will be willing to come forward for cervical cancer screening, a life-saving decision which will enable the detection and treatment of the disease in its earliest stages.

This contrasts sharply with the current situation where most women are refusing to be screened due to the fear, embarrassment and discomfort associated with Pap tests. According to Ministry of Health reports, an average of only 25% of eligible women undertook Pap tests between 2013 and 2017.

This low rate of uptake explains why so many women are suffering and dying from cervical cancer. It is the third most common cancer among women in Malaysia, with 3 out of 4 patients diagnosed with the disease aged less than 64 years. This is unacceptable because cervical cancer is preventable and when early changes are detected, effective treatment is available.

On this note, we welcome the advent of R.O.S.E., an innovation by University of Malaya (UM) and VCS Foundation (VCSF) of Australia that is set to make a real difference by **Removing Obstacles to Cervical Screening**, as its name suggests.

According to Professor Dr. Woo Yin Ling, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist at UM, who headed the pilot programme, R.O.S.E. integrates self-sampling, HPV testing and e-health technology to enhance every woman's personal journey of maintaining good cervical health.

She explained, “At its heart, R.O.S.E. is driven by empathy for the screening experience of women. ROSE embodies safety, privacy and dignity through self-sampling, encouraging more women to willingly participate in screening in a timely manner.”

“The HPV test is evidence-based and highly accurate, providing greater reassurance to women and their families. The improved diagnostic accuracy allows for significantly less frequent testing over a woman’s lifetime.

“However, it is the e-health component that makes ROSE unique and powerful. It utilises mobile technology and VCSF’s canSCREEN®, a population health management platform that enables healthcare professionals to track the progress of every woman screened through their lifetime, regardless of where she was screened – be it a government or a private clinic.

“This provides a welcome safety net to ensure women are screened at recommended intervals and followed up accordingly. It also allows optimisation of health resources by preventing duplication of services while establishing a powerful resource to monitor our progress towards eliminating cervical cancer as a nation.”

Professor Woo highlighted that a multi-sectoral collaborative effort was established to conduct the R.O.S.E. Pilot Project in 5 ministry of health clinics in 2018. It involved the participation and support of academia, government, corporate, non-profit organisations, as well as private philanthropists.

She said, “The pilot project found that 99% of the 4,188 participants preferred the self-sampling method, suggesting that Malaysian women would generally find this new approach to screening more acceptable. Abnormal test results were detected in 5%, and 3 cases of cancer were diagnosed and had the appropriate follow up. The mobile technology and e-health facilitated comprehensive follow through of the ‘screening to treatment’ pathway in the women.

“The studies also found a high level of engagement with the R.O.S.E. model among participating healthcare professionals. They were very encouraged by its potential to increase the uptake of cervical screening by women attending the clinics while not burdening the healthcare staff with additional administrative workload.”

Professor Woo stressed: “The results confirm that R.O.S.E. is the right solution for strengthening our national cervical cancer screening programme.”

R.O.S.E. was launched today by YAB Dato' Seri Dr. Wan Azizah Dr. Wan Ismail, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia at the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between UM & VCSF. The ceremony was also graced by YB Datuk Seri Dr. Haji Dzulkefly bin Ahmad, Minister of Health and YB Hannah Yeoh, Deputy Minister of Women, Family and Community Development.

The MoU was signed by Professor Dato' Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman, Dean of the Medical Faculty of UM and Associate Professor Marion Saville, Executive Director of VCSF. Both organisations will establish a not-for-profit joint venture to combine their expertise to enable the implementation of R.O.S.E. as a cervical screening programme in Malaysia.

The game changing potential of R.O.S.E. has been recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO), Union for International Cancer Control, International Papillomavirus Society, National Cancer Institute of the US, and International Federation of Gynaecology & Obstetrics.

In his letter, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of WHO, congratulated our Deputy Prime Minister and Health Minister for their leadership and commitment to achieve the vision of eliminating cervical cancer in Malaysia.

Endorsing the women-centred approach of R.O.S.E., Dr Ghebreyesus said our country is well on its way to meeting WHO's target of screening and managing 70% of women at the ages of 35 and 45 by the year 2030.

He also reiterated other targets, including vaccinating 90% of girls by age 15 against Human Papillomavirus (HPV) associated with cervical cancer (Malaysia's coverage for 13-year-old girls stands at over 95%) and reducing mortality from cervical cancer by 30%.

To date, no country has implemented a programme like ROSE incorporating the three components of self-sampling, HPV testing and a digital platform that securely monitors the entire screening journey of women through an integrated system. Malaysia will be the first in the world and a model for others to follow.

#roseagainstcervicalcancer

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