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Thursday November 19, 2009

Government to speed up growth of health tourism

By JOSHUA FOONG

PETALING JAYA: The Government aims to support the health tourism industry to accelerate the growth of Malaysia's market share from 0.29% now to 2% by 2012, said Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop.

The target will see the country generating revenue of RM4.04bil in 2012 from RM400mil currently.

"Healthcare travel has been identified as one of the new sources of growth within the context of the country's new economic model premised on high income," Nor Mohamed said yesterday.

He was speaking at the opening of the Association of Private Hospitals of Malaysia (APHM) International Healthcare Travel Conference 2009.

Nor Mohamed, who is in charge of the Economic Planning Unit, said the growth of healthcare was consistent with increasing contribution of the services sector to the national economy.

He added that Malaysia's healthcare had a reputation for high quality and value-for-money services, thus being an attractive incentive to draw foreigners to the country.

Later at a press conference, APHM president Dr Jacob Thomas assured that the private healthcare industry had the necessary infrastructure and tools to accommodate further development, especially the ones brought about by the growth in healthcare tourism.

Dr Jacob said private hospitals in the country did not face any shortage of doctors and would have enough of them to care for patients, both local and foreign.

"Even when private hospitals may not be able to fill vacancies for doctors, we are allowed to hire them from other countries," he added.

In view with the Government's intention to formulate specific policies to facilitate the growth of healthcare tourism, Dr Jacob hopes that private hospitals will be given tax incentives to refurbish their wards and rooms, a policy now benefiting the hotel industry.

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