

# Govt supports stem cell research, says Liow

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** The Health Ministry fully supports local stem cell research, its minister, Datuk Liow Tiong Lai, said yesterday.

“We are very supportive of the efforts of the private sector to make Malaysia a leading centre in the field of stem cell therapy and research. The ministry is committed financially to support stem cell development in Malaysia,” he said.

Recently, the cabinet approved RM32 million for the ministry to further develop and strengthen stem cell and blood bank activities, including:

- » RM5.86 million for the setting up of a stem cell transplantation laboratory in the Institute for Medical Research (IMR);
- » RM18.87 million for the expansion of the public cord banking facility

in the National Blood Bank and in Sultan Abdul Halim Hospital, Sungai Petani; and

» RM5.57 million to strengthen stem cell and bone marrow transplantation services in Ampang Hospital.

Currently, cord blood stem cells are stored in five blood banks nationwide – the National Blood Bank, Stemlife, Cryocord, Stemtech, and Cell Save International (CSI).

The cells are used mainly to treat heart disorders, acute or chronic leukaemia and orthopaedic injuries.

Liow reminded researchers and doctors to conduct their research ethically and responsibly, stressing that “the ministry is supportive of the active involvement of local researchers but the research must be within existing ethical guidelines”.

“We will monitor the research

activities to safeguard the public in this very promising field of cell transplantation. Any new research or therapies will be subject to the approval of the ministry,” he said.

“The National Transplantation Council (NTC), chaired by the health director-general, is the main governing body of the transplantation programme.

“The council’s responsibilities include recommending policies on organ, tissue and cell transplantation to ensure the highest ethical and professional standards in the practice of transplantation.”

Liow, who delivered a keynote address in a briefing on the current status of stem cell research in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, said the ministry has also formed a National Stem Cell Committee to assist NTC in developing leadership and governance for stem cell research and transplantation.