

Headline	Go back to basics to stem HIV rise		
MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	02 Jul 2013	Color	Black/white
Section	Nation	Circulation	304,904
Page No	24	Readership	1,026,812
Language	English	ArticleSize	163 cm <sup>2</sup>
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 3,597
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 10,791



# 'Go back to basics to stem HIV rise'

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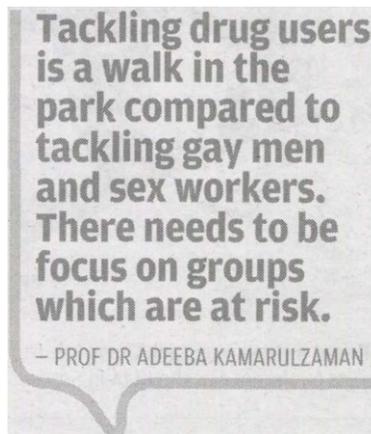
**KUALA LUMPUR:** There is a need to go "back to basics" if Malaysia wants to stem a further rise in HIV cases caused by sexual transmission, an infectious disease expert said.

"When it comes to heterosexual transmission, you need to provide sex education. For infections to be arrested, it has to start at school with education that is age appropriate and evidence-based," said Prof Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman, local co-chair of IAS 2013 conference yesterday.

When it came to the key affected populations such as men who have sex with men (MSM), Dr Adeeba said one had to be more innovative such as using new media tools to reach out to them.

"Tackling drug users is a walk in the park compared with tackling gay men and sex workers. There needs to be focus on groups which are at risk. We need to separate religion from health," she added.

Dr Adeeba, who is also the Centre



of Excellence for Research in AIDS director, was commenting on a statement by Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam that intervention of sexual transmission has been included as one of the major activities in the battle against HIV in Malaysia.

This follows a rise in cases caused by injected drug abuse and sexual transmission, including among women and the MSM.

In 2011, the number of HIV infec-

tions through sexual transmission had overtaken that by injecting drug users (IDUs) with a ratio of 6:4.

However, she also warned that focus should stay on IDUs including putting them on treatment.

Malaysian Society for HIV Medicine immediate past president Datuk Dr Christopher Lee said it was important to use the data available to draw up behavioural studies in order to have a programme which was more focused.

He added that gaining access to sex workers was also difficult because the scenario had changed over the years.

"The syndicates will not let you go near them and they are also mobile," he added.

Unaid Asia and the Pacific regional support team director Steven J. Krauss said Malaysia had to keep on moving and "readjusting their sights" when it came to battling HIV/AIDS.

Sexual transmission, he added, was a "tough issue" for every country.

But, what was needed was to create a space to talk to each other.