

Going to the field approach changes senior citizens' view on vaccination

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KUALA LUMPUR: Last week, my mother Khadijah Ujang, who is 78 years old, finally received her first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, thus enabling us five siblings to heave a sigh of relief.

At first, she insisted on not wanting to be vaccinated, on the grounds of living alone and not going anywhere, which in her opinion was enough to be a shield to protect herself from being infected with the Covid-19 virus.

Our efforts to persuade her to get vaccinated failed until the Jempol Parliamentary Mobile Vaccination Programme was held at the Kampung Lonek Homestay hall for three days, starting June 15.

The approach taken by the MP for Jempol Datuk Mohd Salim Mohd Sharif, who mobilised the vaccination centre to the community, has been very helpful to the residents, especially the elderly who are the majority of the residents in the traditional village here.

Interestingly, from the information session on the vaccine right up to the registration process and vaccination, everything has been smoothly managed, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MOH).

Not only that, the transportation problems faced by the elderly in the village who are unable to walk or drive or

ride their own vehicles, are also being solved by providing tram facilities to pick them up and take them home after vaccination.

As a result, a total of 400 residents of Kampung Lonek have benefited from this programme by receiving the first dose of the vaccine, including my mother who received hers on the last day of the programme, June 17.

This is one of the examples of efforts or approaches that can be implemented by elected representatives and community leaders in the village, to jointly mobilise efforts to attract more senior citizens to come forward to get the vaccine under the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme.

My mother is a perfect example, as she initially refused to listen to the advice of immediate family members to get vaccinated; however she changed her mind and finally agreed to receive the vaccine shot after realising the benefits.

Among the reasons for her excitement was when she saw many of her fellow villagers who had been vaccinated and shared 'pleasant' experiences, thus completely changing her opinion on the vaccine.

The thing she was most worried about before was the effects of vaccination due to her age.

However, her preconception of the vaccine proved to be wrong, as there were no severe side effects after vaccination, and



Mohd Salim observes as a nurse prepares to vaccinate Samsiah Yusuf, 73, at her home in Kampung Lonek on June 15. — Bernama photo

she could continue doing her daily activities such as cooking, housework and gardening

around the house.

Admittedly, there are many aspects that need to be taken

into account in implementing vaccination especially for the elderly, particularly for those living in rural and remote areas, due to age, health and transportation.

This is one of the main challenges in the implementation of the second phase of the immunisation programme, which gives priority to the elderly and persons with disabilities (PwDs).

As of June 5, about one million out of 3.5 million senior citizens aged 60 and above have received at least one dose of the vaccine, and Malaysia is targeting 80 per cent of the population or about 24 million people to be vaccinated by February 2022 to achieve herd immunity.

Therefore, to expedite the administration of vaccines to target groups such as the elderly, mobile vaccination is more practical, as suggested by health experts.

Village representatives such as penghulu, village heads and community leaders, especially in rural areas, need to come together more 'aggressively' to persuade the community to understand the effects of pandemic and the importance of vaccination, according to Dr Syed Agil Alsagoff, a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM).

"Their strong influence in the community should be used to translate the government's mission by disseminating information about vaccination

to the community.

"They (community leaders) should use the space available to help in efforts to ensure that the country achieves herd immunity, and subsequently flatten the curve of the Covid-19 infection," he told Bernama.

He said that mobile vaccination services in villages and rural areas should be further expanded, by using the group method to reduce the logistic problems.

This is to enable the villagers to get vaccination services quickly and efficiently, especially among the community who are unable to move about such as the disabled and the elderly.

He further explained that counselling sessions with the members of the community should also be increased to give them high confidence to carry out their responsibilities.

"Leaders such as elected representatives and district officers should use their creativity to conduct awareness campaigns, by travelling from house to house in residential areas, providing clear explanation on the importance of vaccination and the process involved, so that it can be easily understood by this group," he said.

Those aged 60 and above are given priority in the second phase of the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme which is currently underway, as senior citizens are categorised as a vulnerable and high-risk group. — Bernama