

Putting women's health first

BY DENISSA GOH

> Dr Alice Lee and her team at one-stop wellness clinic ADCAS share the importance for the fairer sex to take better care of themselves

A WOMAN typically plays the role of a mother, wife, daughter, sister, career woman, and more. The more roles she takes up, the more responsibilities she has and the stresses add up.

While women are well aware of their responsibilities, it's worrying that not many are aware of the health status of their own bodies.

In conjunction with International Women's Day today, we spoke to geneticist Dr Alice Lee and her team from ADCAS on the importance of preventive healthcare for women.

Lee is the founder of ADCAS (Advance Care Service), a one-stop wellness clinic in Berjaya Times Square that provides comprehensive individualised healthcare services based on the life sciences approach.

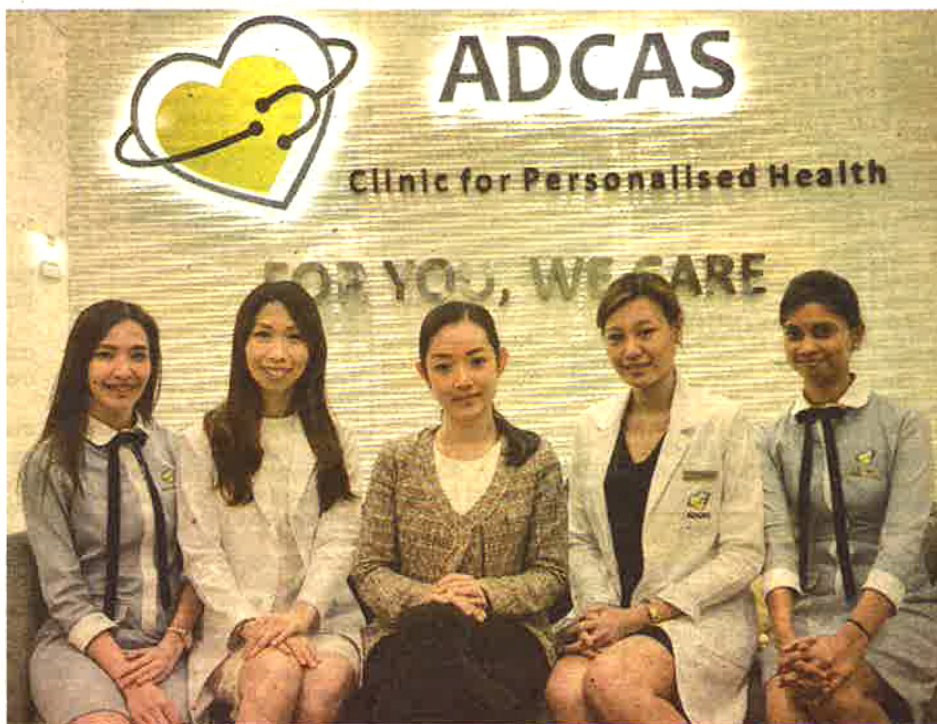
She says: "These days, women put their family's needs as their top priority and they neglect their own health, and I think it shouldn't be the case at all.

"Women's health is so important in the family as [women] play [such] a fundamental [role]. If they are healthy, their entire family and community will benefit from it."

While breast and cervical cancers rank high as causes of death among women, Dr Tan Su-Lin points to non-communicable diseases such as stroke and heart disease which are commonly triggered by high levels of cholesterol and blood pressure as the main culprit.

Apart from stress, dietician and nutrition consultant Dr Agnes Chen explains that poor diet and physical inactivity are also the other main factors.

She adds: "Evidence shows that in order to change a family's health status, it should start with the women.



ASHRAF SHAMSUL/THESUN

(left, from second left) Chen, Lee and Tan ... advocating the need for women to be educated about their own healthcare.

"It starts with what they cook or what food they choose to bring home to prepare for their family, and other basic things."

But for that to happen, Lee (below) argues that health education has to come first.

She says: "Health education should actually start in the household, from young - that's where they should understand that general wellbeing is important, and it's not just

about achieving personal goals in life because our health is actually our biggest wealth.

"I believe women's rights and human rights should be synonymous - a lot of people [fail to realise] that basic improvements in health have yet to reach all the women out there."

Lee also stresses on the importance of women finding out about their own health risks, so that they can take preventive measures.

"Eating healthy, performing physical activities and [maintaining a balanced weight] should be the norm, but before that, you need to know your current condition, so an annual checkup should be a standard [requirement]."

Lee adds that an annual checkup is important because our intolerance level changes as we grow older, depending on our immune system that is moulded through the lifestyle we lead.

"Taking care of small things like allergies and food intolerance can make your bowels happier because our bowels have

neurons, and the health of our bowels interlinks with our mental health - and it can directly lead to depression and anxiety."

Many Malaysians also are not aware of their family medical history and the risks they may face from it because they don't see the importance.

"I'm speaking purely from a geneticist's point of view ... some people may have inherited certain types of mutations that actually increases their risk for certain cancers," says Lee.

"We geneticists believe in the Knudson's two-hit theory, where the first hit may be hereditary, and the second hit comes from our environment, lifestyle and diet.

"If a person knows about her risks, [and improves] her lifestyle completely, this will [reduce] the chances of getting a second hit."

Tan adds that many Malaysian women take their discomforts for granted, and often put the blame on harmless external factors.

"A lot of people are not aware of allergies that they might have, and they conclude it is masalrah angin or masuk angin ... So, it's a lot on education per se, and we as a country are lacking in that."

For more, visit the ADCAS Lifescience website.