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AstraZeneca introduces AI-based lung screening technology in Malaysia

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Paves the way for the adoption of AI technology in chest x-ray for early lung screening at government health facilities



In conjunction with Institut Kanser Negara's (IKN) 10th anniversary, UK-based pharma firm AstraZeneca has announced its collaboration to accelerate digitalisation in healthcare by introducing Artificial Intelligence (AI) X-ray technology into early lung screening at government clinics and hospitals under the Projek Saringan Awal Paru-Paru (SAPU) programme. As a centre of excellence for cancer care in the country, IKN will be the first government institution in the country to implement this AI technology.

In Malaysia, lung cancer is one of the most common cancers, accounting for 19:1 deaths per 100,000 population in the country. Worryingly, 80% of patients are diagnosed at stage four, when the cancer has spread to other body parts, making early screening crucial to expedite diagnosis and treatment for patients.

Projek SAPU aims to act as a catalyst to encourage the adoption of AI X-ray screening by other government healthcare facilities, fostering a broader embrace of early screening for lung abnormalities as well as advancing research efforts in lung care. SAPU also aspires to close the gap in screening by broadening the public's access to this cutting-edge technology and identifying more patients in the early stages of cancer.

This initiative is part of AstraZeneca's early AI-powered lung cancer screening under its flagship Lung Ambition Alliance programme, which was first rolled out in 2021 at the primary care level with private clinics.

Under this third phase named Projek SAPU, the AI technology will also be rolled out as a pilot study at selected government clinics and hospitals across the country, with selected centres acting as 'sandbox sites' to collate data on the roll-out results. Data gained from the programme will be used to develop an understanding of Malaysia's local landscape and disease demographics.

Projek SAPU expands beyond lung cancer screening. As the AI technology works by evaluating X-rays, the technology also enables healthcare practitioners to detect more than 30 lung-related diseases or pathologies, such as COVID-19, tuberculosis

and lung fibrosis.

Image caption- Vinod Narayanan – Country President, AstraZeneca Malaysia, together with Dr Puteri Norliza binti Megat Ramli – Deputy Director, Institut Kanser Negara