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Reality check *on* lifestyle choices

> Send a health report card to your loved ones in AIA's unique online campaign to share your concerns and encourage them to take control of their health

BY JEREMY CHEONG

IN THIS day and age, many of us tend to ignore the fact that we're leading very unhealthy lifestyles until something unfortunate happens.

While many of us may not notice the state of our health, our loved ones do.

This was the conclusion drawn from a survey conducted by life insurance company AIA Bhd through its new online campaign called The Health Report Card.

This campaign gives Malaysians a chance to send health report cards to their loved ones to share their concerns and, hopefully, encourage them to take control of their health before they become another statistic of lifestyle-related diseases.

"Our insights show that many Malaysians spend most of their time worrying about the well-being of their loved ones, be it their children, spouses or parents, and as a result, they tend to overlook their own health," said AIA Bhd chief marketing officer Thomas Wong, at the launch of the campaign.

"We hope our message will inspire all Malaysians to first look inward and start adopting lifestyle habits that will allow them to lead longer and healthier lives."

Also present at the launch were AIA Health Services chief officer Jamie Yu, consultant dietician Indra Balaratnam, and Gleaneagles Kuala Lumpur consultant urologist Dr George Lee, who were part of a panel discussion on the common health issues faced by Malaysians and what can be done to curb them.

To kickstart the campaign, AIA asked 203 primary school pupils, aged between seven and 12, in the Klang Valley to assess the state of their parents' diet, physical activity as well as emotional well-being.

When asked why they chose primary school pupils, Wong said: "Children are very observant by nature, and as such, it was fascinating to get their candid responses to questions on their parents' health.

"Unsurprisingly, their responses reflected what we probably know, but are reluctant to admit - that we do not exercise enough, we spend too much time at work or on our mobile devices, and our diets are not as nutritious as they should be."

Wong added that we should ask ourselves whether we are setting a good example for our children.

"Or will the cycle of poor lifestyle choices continue into the next generation?"

AIA's endeavour comes at the right time, as recent reports stated that lifestyle-related diseases such as hypertension, heart disease, cancer and high cholesterol are on the rise in Malaysia.

These reports even placed Malaysia as the fattest country in Southeast Asia, with some 44% of Malaysians falling into the obese category.

Last year, the number of cases of diabetes and kidney disease rose to 3.2 million and 2.5 million respectively. Also, one in four Malaysians are expected to be diagnosed with cancer before their 75th birthday.

Dr Lee said: "The rise in lifestyle-related diseases can be attributed to three main drivers: poor nutrition, sedentary lifestyles and work-related stress.

"In Malaysia, it is not uncommon for people to be sitting at their work stations for hours on end and eating at odd hours of the night.

"Couple this with the fact that most Malaysians do not exercise regularly - and you have a national health situation that could soon reach crisis levels if left unchecked."

Furthermore, with medical inflation reported at 12% per annum, the rising cost of healthcare is definitely another reason why Malaysians should start paying more attention to their health.

AIA stated that its data showed a 19% and 41% increase in the average cost per admission for diabetes and heart disease, respectively, between 2010 and 2014.

So start sending out Health Report Cards to your loved ones to show that you care.

For every Health Report Card shared on Facebook, you will receive a voucher from Lovy Pharmacy as well as stand a chance to win a RM200 health check from BP Healthcare.

For details, visit www.healthreportcard.com.my.

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At the launch of AIA's latest health campaign ... (from left) Wong, Indra, Yu and Lee.