New Straits Times : 15 September 2006 IPOH, FRI.: Mental health disorders have become a major cause for concern as they are among the country's top 10 diseases.

The Raja Muda of Perak, Raja Dr Nazrin Shah, said mental disorders ranging from anxiety to depression and neurological and behavioural problems are plaguing many Malaysians today. He said a national health and morbidity survey in 2001 showed that the percentage of adults who suffered psychological problems had increased to 19 per cent from 11 per cent recorded in a survey 10 years ago.

"The third survey to be completed this year are expected to show a further increase in the numbers," he said at the opening of the 6th Perak Mental Health Convention here today.

"These figures are alarming. Mental health problems are a burden on patients and their families. This ranges from loss of income to disruptions in daily routine and restrictions on social activities," he said, adding that at present, there were about 2,500 deaths from suicides each year.

Raja Nazrin said the effects of mental illness on society and the economy are long-lasting and wide-ranging.

He was therefore pleased that under the Ninth Malaysia Plan, mental health promotion would be emphasised to improve the overall health status of Malaysians.

He said increasing the awareness on mental health and early diagnosis of psychological disorders will help in the successful treatment and rehabilitation of patients.

However, he noted that there are only 240 psychiatrists in the country, which translates to less than one psychiatrist per 100,000 population.

This, he said, is a far cry from the 3.4 psychiatrists per 100,000 population ratio recommended by the World Health Organisation.

Raja Nazrin said the stigma attached to psychological disorders is also another barrier to positive mental health.

He urged the media to help educate society and provide information on treatment and rehabilitation options.