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PROFESSIONAL BULLETIN

For members only

RAMADHAN GREETINGS

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BIM's EVENT

MANGROVE TREE PLANTING PROGRAM
27 & 28 February 2022

Mangrove Tree Planting Program was organized in collaboration with Institut Rimbawan Malaysia (IRIM), Majlis Perbandaran Sepang, Balai Ikhtisas Malaysia and Selangor State Forestry Department on 27 & 28 February 2022. The program was held at Jeti Sirip Biru, Bagan Lalang, Sepang. This program attended by Vice President, Ir Gunasagaran Kristnan and other exco members, Dr Ismail Harun, Dr Rosazlin Abdullah and Mr Wong Khin Yip.

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BIM's EVENT

TREE PLANTING MANGROVE TREE PLANTING PROGRAM
27 & 28 February 2022

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WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY 2022
15 March 2022

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Malaysia's 1st Engineering and ACM V&R Exhibition and Conference
16 - 19 March 2022 @ KLCC

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Congratulations

Message to Prof. Azlinda Azman, MASW President

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Congratulations

Message to Dato' LAr Ismail bin Ngah, Past President of BIM

ILAM Lifetime Achievement Award 2022

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MLAA12 Gala Night

Wembley Hotel, George Town, Penang
25 March 2022.

Officiated by Chief Minister of Penang, YAB Tuan Chow Kon Yeow

Dr Wilmot, BIM President attended the MLAA12 Gala Night

Dato' LAr Ismail Ngah, recipient of the ILAM Lifetime Achievement Awards

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NEWS

WHILE LAUDING HEALTH MINISTRY'S EXTRA POSTS MOVE, MPS SUGGESTS 1:3 PHARMACIST-TO-DOCTOR RATIO

NST, 11 February 2022

The Health Ministry's effort to increase pharmacist positions in the public sector would ensure continuity of care, more job opportunities and security for pharmacy graduates.

KUALA LUMPUR: The Health Ministry's effort to increase pharmacist positions in the public sector would ensure continuity of care, more job opportunities and security for pharmacy graduates.

The Malaysian Pharmacists Society (MPS) president Amrahi Buang said this today while applauding Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin's announcement over the matter.

"MPS would like to thank YB (Khairy) and the cabinet for agreeing to this as this ensures a continuity of care as well as more job opportunities and security for our pharmacy graduates," he said in a statement.

The Malaysian Pharmacists Society (MPS) president Amrahi Buang

Khairy had yesterday announced that the cabinet has approved the creation of 8,686 extra posts for medical, dental and pharmaceutical officers from 2022 to 2025.

The minister had said at least 1,500 permanent posts of medical officers, dental officers and pharmacists will be created in the Health Ministry every year beginning 2023 until 2025.

Amrahi, however, said the MPS felt the government should consider raising the number of the new permanent posts for pharmacists in a ratio of 1:3 with doctors.

He said this was because of the need in providing current and new pharmaceutical services for the benefit of patients in the country.

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He said this in reference to the ministry's announcement that the cabinet had agreed to increase the number of permanent posts for pharmacists in the public sector to 300 for the year 2022.

Amrahi further said it fully supports the introduction of a competency examination to assess the quality of our graduates in which only the best can qualify for the permanent posts.

"We hope this exam would assess both knowledge and soft skills which will translate into more consistent selection of candidates for the posts," he added.

Khairy had announced that 4,186 additional permanent posts will be created in the ministry in 2022, which covers the appointment of a total of 3,586 medical officers, 300 dental and 300 pharmaceutical officers.

In addition, he said the cabinet has also agreed that a total of 800 permanent positions for physicians and 70 spots for dentists be created in the ministry yearly starting in 2023 to cover the output of permanent physicians in health facilities under the ministry.

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NEWS

MMA: NO LINK YET BETWEEN OMICRON CASES AND PARACETAMOL SUPPLY IRREGULARITY

NST, 20 February 2022

KUALA LUMPUR: There are no actual statistics on the Omicron variant causing a shortage of paracetamol in the market, a drug commonly used to relieve fever and headache.

There are no actual statistics on the Omicron variant causing a shortage of paracetamol in the market, a drug commonly used to relieve fever and headache.

Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Koh Kar Chai in a statement today said that while it is true there is an irregularity in the supply of paracetamol in the country, there is no actual shortage.

"Leading brands sell out faster in pharmacies and convenient stores and this is where a shortage is seen.

"Without actual statistics, it is not known if Omicron infection is the direct cause of it."

Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Koh Kar Chai in a statement today said that while it is true there is an irregularity in the supply of paracetamol in the country, there is no actual shortage.

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Koh explained that the high rate of vaccination may have caused more people to take paracetamol for common mild side effects like fever or body aches.

"As for increased usage due to the Omicron variant, we know that most cases are either asymptomatic or with mild symptoms.

"It could be that some are just purchasing it in case they become unwell," he said.
Koh also advised those who are allergic to the Non-Steroidal Anti Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) which includes aspirin and other pain killers, that the only choice of fever medicine will be paracetamol.

"They will have to depend on sponging or baths to bring down a high fever if needed.

"A word of caution to using NSAIDs for fever. Only use it upon consultation with your doctor as it comes with a host of complications if used incorrectly," he said.
Earlier today, Malaysian Pharmacists Society (MPS) president Amrahi Buang said the issue of a supply shortage only involved one brand that produces the drug.

Although some may link the Omicron variant cases with the need to stock up on paracetamol, apparently the cases of shortages in supply had only involved one brand of the drug.

He said other brands of the drug and the generic form of paracetamol could still be found on the shelves of pharmacies and shops.

Yesterday, Bernama reported that community pharmacies, shelves displaying the paracetamol, especially a leading trademark, were empty due to high demand during the recent rise in Covid-19 numbers.

According to pharmacists, the shortage is also believed to stem from increased purchases for reducing side effects such as fever, joint pain and headaches after receiving booster dose injections.

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COULD THE COVID-19 VIRUS EVADE THE VACCINES?

FMT, 1 March 2022

It is now well known that SARS-CoV-2 can mutate to evade vaccine protection against infection. The Omicron variants – BA.1, B1.1, and BA.2 – can infect those who were previously infected by other variants, even when vaccinated.

And though a third booster shot offers some protection from an Omicron infection, it wanes after three or four months, leaving most people susceptible to reinfection. That said, the immunity conveyed by prior infection or vaccination still dramatically reduces the incidence of hospitalisation and death.

We also have come to realise that our main saviors against Covid-19 turn out not to be antibodies, but rather another part of the immune system: our T cells.

Studies show that the strength of our long-lived T-cell response to SARS-CoV-2 proteins – especially by T cells that recognise the virus spike protein – strongly correlates with the degree of protection.

There are two types of T cells, CD4+ and CD8+, which are distinguished by proteins on their surface. Because CD4+ T cells mostly assist in the production of antibodies, the CD8+ T cells are the real heroes of the story.

Once they identify an invader they remember from a previous encounter, they act quickly to move in for the kill, demolishing infected cells and cutting short the life cycle of the virus.

Until Omicron, the differences in neutralisation by vaccine-induced antibodies and by monoclonal antibodies were relatively minor. But the process by which T cells recognise viral proteins is very different from that of antibodies, which recognise structures on the intact viral protein.

We know that these critical structures, particularly those of the exterior spike protein, differ from variant to variant. It is precisely such structural diversity that allows the virus to evade most antibodies made in response to natural infection and vaccination.

By contrast, our T cells do not recognise intact proteins. Rather, T-cell recognition occurs when a viral protein within a cell is chopped into short segments and cradled in the grip of a cellular protein called MHC type 1.

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MHC type 1 presents the viral fragment to the T cell at the cell surface, where the T cell can recognise the combination of the viral fragment presented by the MHC type 1 protein.

All told, T cells recognise and react to a very broad array of viral protein fragments. For SARS-CoV-2, these fragments overlap very little with the regions of the virus that are sensitive to neutralisation by antibodies.

That is why T-cell responses to viral infection are generally preserved across variants. Until Omicron, vaccines that use one viral protein raised almost the same T-cell response to all variants. But now the situation has changed. Not everyone is alike when it comes to binding viral protein fragments.

Our MHC type 1 proteins are diverse, and each recognises a unique set of viral protein fragments. Our reaction to viral proteins thus depends on their sequence and that of our own particular MHC type 1 set of proteins.

Consider a recent study by Gaurav D Gaiha and his colleagues, who examined T-cell responses to the Wuhan, Delta, and Omicron strains in people who have been either infected, vaccinated, and boosted, or infected and vaccinated (but not boosted). They found that most people who are infected after vaccination have strong and durable CD4+- and CD8+-positive responses to all three variants.

But there was one worrying discovery. Approximately 20% of those vaccinated showed a decline of greater than 50% in T-cell response to Omicron, compared to the Wuhan and Delta variants; and in some the decline was even more profound.

These poor T-cell responses were not correlated with sex or age, and follow-up experiments revealed that the difference was due to lower CD8+ reactivity, rather than to the CD4+ T-cell response.

The authors therefore refined the analysis by examining T cells' ability to recognise specific fragments of viral proteins. To that end, they used a set of short protein fragments to recreate the entire spike protein, and they used a similar set of protein fragments corresponding to the virus' other structural proteins.

They found that whereas T cells recognised all the viral fragments of the spike protein used for vaccination, they failed to recognise some of the protein fragments.

The authors thus speculate that CD8+ T cells' inability to respond to Omicron may be due to a lack of recognition of the mutated peptides. Indeed, their theoretical calculations are consistent with the hypothesis that changes in the amino acid sequence of the Omicron spike protein underlie the observed blind spots in T-cell recognition.

Inherited differences in the ability to recognise specific protein fragments likely account for some people's failure to mount anti-Omicron defenses. The authors have conjectured "it is possible that these individuals will have reduced protection against severe disease".

One sobering conclusion, then, is that Omicron has drifted so far from the original strain that the 20% cohort in the study may not be fully protected either from infection or from hospitalisation and death.

However, after finding that a third vaccine dose increases T-cell responses by twentyfold or more, even for those who respond poorly, Gaiha has a more optimistic take.

"While the Omicron spike protein was able to escape T cells in a subset of individuals," he told me, "what we learned is that this deficiency in T-cell recognition can be overcome by booster vaccination. In addition, we found that non-spike proteins could be attractive targets for second-generation vaccines to protect against future SARS-CoV-2 evolution".

Gaiha espouses the optimistic interpretation. But Omicron is a warning that future SARS-CoV-2 variants may escape protection from both antibodies and T-cell immunity.

We cannot predict that a variant that evades vaccines' ability to protect against infection and serious illness will arise, but we must be prepared for such a threat, lest we remain unguarded against it.

Writer: William A Haseltine, a scientist, biotech entrepreneur, and infectious disease expert, is chair and president of the global health think tank ACCESS Health International.

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'SANDOSHAM GOLD MEDAL' FOR VETERINARIAN DR VELLAYAN

NST, 22 March 2022

PUTRAJAYA: After nearly five decades of dedicated service, a leading don earned a prestigious recognition for his work.

Associate Prof Datuk Dr Vellayan Subramaniam, who will turn 70 on June 1, perhaps the country's foremost zoo veterinarian, was awarded the 'Sandosham Gold Medal 2021' by the Malaysian Society of Parasitology and Tropical Medicine (MSPTM).

MSPTM president Dr Sam Mohan announced the award for Dr Vellayan via a virtual ceremony, that was witnessed by society members nationwide and practicing veterinarians in Asia.

Associate Prof Datuk Dr Vellayan Subramaniam using a stethoscope to examine a cockerel at his Exotic Animal Veterinary clinic at Taman Melawati, Kuala Lumpur

"It is our honour to award Dr Vellayan, for his tireless and dedicated services to the industry and society at large. He is a very senior and revered veterinarian, not only in Malaysia but in Asia," said Dr Sam, adding that Dr Vellayan, who has been a member of MSPTM since 1982, was the 15th recipient of the award named after the late University of Malaya in Singapore's Parasitology Department head Prof Dr A.A. Sandosham.

Dr Sandosham, who had also served as principal and vice-chancellor of the university, was a MSPTM founder and first president.

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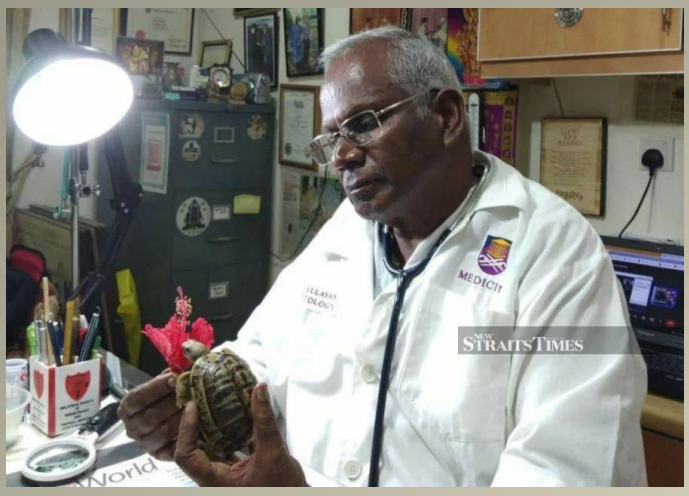

Associate Prof Datuk Dr Vellayan Subramaniam feeding a baby turtle at his Exotic Animal Veterinary clinic at Taman Melawati, Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Sam said that Dr Vellayan, who had served as a Veterinary Association of Malaysia acting president, had made valuable contributions to the study and research on parasitology and tropical medicine in South-East Asia.

"The Sandosham medal, awarded triennially, is the highest mark of distinction given to someone in recognition of his original and outstanding contributions, in the field of parasitology and tropical medicine in South-East Asia," said Dr Sam.

He hoped the award would spur others and urged more MSPTM members to excel in their research studies for the benefit of the animal kingdom and mankind.

On Dr Vellayan, Dr Sam said his contributions during his 28-year tenure at Zoo Negara earned him a spot in the Malaysia Book of Records as the 'Longest Serving Zoo Veterinarian'.

"At Zoo Negara, Dr Vellayan made many significant contributions to the overall development of the facility and in the field of wildlife medicine in the country. Among others, he was involved in establishing a reputable Zoo Veterinary Hospital of high standard.

"He was directly involved in the training of zoo keepers and industrial training for undergraduate students from Malaysia and foreign universities.

"These contributions were well acknowledged by the Malaysian Zoological Societies' first chairman, the late Tan Sri V.M. Hutson," said Dr Sam.

He added at Zoo Negara, Dr Vellayan had developed a cordial working relationship with local universities and the various institutions and the Regional Diagnostic Laboratory in Petaling Jaya.

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"He developed sound networking and linkages with the laboratory staff and members of MSPTM serving with the institutions.

"Over the years, he has received valuable support in disease investigation from this association, a fact which Dr Vellayan remembers with fond memories. In all, Dr Vellayan has clocked 40 years of experience in zoo, wildlife and exotic animal medicine and surgery.

"He has also given over 100 talks on animal health and related matters over local radio and television stations, including Radio UFM, University Teknoloji Malaysia (UiTM) and foreign television networks.

"He has also to date contributed his expertise towards over 80 news features in local newspapers," said Dr Sam.

He paid tribute to Dr Vellayan who is known as a pioneer researcher on parasites of zoo animals and wildlife for nearly five decades.

"He has magnanimously donated all the parasite samples isolated by him to MSPTM's future museum and to the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at UPM.

"In addition, Dr Vellayan has held offices in over 100 government entities and non-governmental organisations, research institutions and universities.

"He has continuously rendered professional assistance to more than 40 relevant organisations, both in Malaysia and abroad," said Dr Sam.

In recognition of his work, Dr. Vellayan has received several awards and honours, including the fellowship from the Nutrition Society of Malaysia, Veterinary Association Malaysia and the Malaysian Scientific Association.

"Dr Vellayan has been giving free treatment to rejected and sick wildlife brought to his attention by Klang Valley residents all this while," said Dr Sam.

Meanwhile, Dr Vellayan told the New Straits Times that he was indeed proud to receive the highest academic achievement from MSPTM.

"I feel such an award is overdue to many others like me, who continuously have contributed to the veterinary industry and society. It is my earnest hope that more will strive to earn such a recognition," said Dr Vellayan, who runs his Exotic Animal Veterinary clinic in Taman Melawati.

Dr Vellayan was born in Carey Island, Selangor and pursued pre-university studies at the South Indian Vanniar Educational Trust (SIVET) College, Madras University before completing his Bachelor of Veterinary Science from the Madras Veterinary College.

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In 1978, he became a tutor at Universiti Putra Malaysia.

While there, he completed his Masters in Science on Primate Nutrition (Lar Gibbon) in 1981 via funding from the National Health Institute, the United States, through collaboration with the University of Cambridge under its Primate Conservation Research Programme.

He then joined Zoo Negara, progressing as its hospital, zoology and veterinary services head before retiring as its acting director on June 1, 2008.
Dr Vellayan then joined the Faculty of Medicine at UiTM that year.

"It was at UiTM that I began teaching medical parasitology and helped set up its Laboratory Care Unit in 2009 and served as its first director.

Associate Prof Datuk Dr Vellayan Subramaniam examining a duck named Jingjing at his Exotic Animal Veterinary clinic at Taman Melawati, Kuala Lumpur.

"While there, I conducted numerous workshops on rodents, rabbits and snakes," said Dr Vellayan, now and adjunct professor at Sunway University.

In 2013, he joined the Faculty of Medicine at MAHSA University and taught medical parasitology for six months, before joining the Faculty of Pharmacy at UiTM at its Puncak Alam campus in Selangor, to date.

"I was tasked with initiating major improvements at the Laboratory of Animal Facility and Management.

"I also taught at the department of Pharmacology and Veterinary Pharmacology conducing numerous rodent and rabbit workshops for researchers.

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"Additionally, I served with the Health Ministry's Animal Ethics and Research Committee at the Institute of Medical Research, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and the Standards and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia," he said.

Dr Vellayan prides himself for having taught students in diverse fields, from veterinary, dental, medical, pharmacy to biology at various other universities. He was also instrumental in grooming numerous veterinarians locally and abroad.

"Through the years, I have been actively serving as an MSPTM council member in many sub-committees and was involved in organising annual conferences, seminars and fund-raising activities.

"I also served as its president, auditor and editor for its newsletters and membership directory," said Dr Vellayan, who has published 15 papers in the society's journal on tropical biomedicine and delivered 35 oral presentations.

Dr Vellayan is married to retired schoolteacher Poornam Sagathevan and they have a schoolteacher daughter Hema and son Shanker, who is a fourth year medical student.

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FEATURES

SIMPLE RULE IN LIVING WITH COVID: PROTECT YOURSELF TO PROTECT OTHERS

NST, 28 March 2022

THE world has suffered from several pandemics, from the Spanish flu in 1918 through influenza, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in 2003 and Covid-19 now. The last has claimed more than five million lives with more than 420 million people infected.

Covid-19 has caused unprecedented disruptions to socio-economic activities affecting health, social and financial wellbeing, and overwhelming healthcare facilities.

Governments responded by enforcing periodic lockdowns, closing borders, having mask mandates and physical distancing, and conducting mass vaccination. These have been successful to a certain extent, but not fully because of human social behaviours and preferences.

Over the generations, humanity has glued itself to activities in business, travel, social engagement and entertainment, which were made possible by technological advancements.

These activities are the norm in the 21st-century generation and are an intrinsic part of society's lifestyle. Prolonged disruptions to these norms have a negative impact on the physical, mental and financial health of society.

More than two years have passed with no sign of the pandemic abating. New variants such as Delta and Omicron have caused infections and deaths. Controversies have emerged over vaccination mandates and treatment choices.

Many governments have taken steps to navigate through the negative impact. They have adopted the endemic approach to live with Covid-19 in the hope of reviving the economy and social health.

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The coronavirus does not discriminate against anyone. Its survival depends on infecting any human being it possibly can. The majority of those infected are either asymptomatic or acquire a milder disease.

Those who survive a severe infection or succumb may have underlying comorbidity factors or aggressive inflammatory reactions.

To get infected, one needs to be in close contact with an infected person without a barrier for a short period and receive enough viral load.

The response to infection depends on one's immune system. We cannot be sure of the potential severity of the infection.

As such, it is unwise to gamble with our lives to "acquire" an infection by not avoiding close contact.

The majority of those infected are asymptomatic.

They can pass the virus to another person in close contact without barriers. Even children and young adults have succumbed to the infection.

However, we must not let the fear of getting infected prevent us from living our lives. We need to reset our norms to live with Covid-19.

Several countries have modified the use of the face mask.

Others have discarded the mandatory use of a face mask and relaxed the physical distancing rule.
Malaysia has one of the highest infection and vaccination rates.

Come April 1, the nation will step into the endemic stage with some changes to the standard operating procedures.

Close-contact quarantine and travel bubble have changed due to the vaccination programme. However, it is advisable to wear a face mask in public places and adhere to physical distancing.

Living with Covid-19 is about taking personal and social responsibility seriously while pursuing day-to-day activities. Taking personal responsibility means keeping ourselves from getting Covid-19.

We can boost our immune system via a low carbohydrate diet with some protein and lots of vegetables, clean water, regular daily moderate-intensity exercise (like brisk walking and yoga), enough sleep (six to eight hours) and controlled socialising (physical and digital).

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We need to choose our socialising companions, locations and activities to reduce the chances of getting infected.

If there is any change in the coronavirus environment, learn to adjust and adapt to a new norm and stay positive. Negative attitudes towards changes may increase stress, which may weaken the immune system.

Social responsibility means whatever one does to exercise one's rights, it must not breach other people's rights. Our actions have consequences that may negatively affect other people's wellbeing.

If one develops Covid-19-like symptoms, it is best to stay at home, wear a proper mask and monitor the symptoms.

If the symptoms get worse, immediately seek medical help. A simple rule to live with Covid-19 is: "Protect yourself to protect your loved ones and others who also have loved ones to protect". Choose well to live well.

The writer is Associate Professor and Director of Clinical Skills Centre, AIMST University

BIM MEMBER INSTITUTIONS

- Malaysian Pharmacists Society (MPS)
- Royal Institutions of Surveyors Malaysia (RISM)
- The Institutions of Engineers Malaysia (IEM)
- Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia (PAM)
- Malaysian Medical Association (MMA)
- Malaysian Dental Association (MDA)
- Malaysian Institute of Planners (MIP)
- Malaysian Veterinary Medical Association (MAVMA)
- Institut Kimia Malaysia (IKM)
- Malaysian Society of Soil Science (MSSS)
- Malaysian Association of Social Workers (MASW)
- The Plastics Rubber Institute of Malaysia (PRIM)
- Agricultural of Institute of Malaysia (AIM)
- The Chartered Institute of Building Malaysia (CIOBM)
- Institute of Landscape Architects Malaysia (ILAM)
- Institut Rimbawan Malaysia (IRIM)
- Institute of Internal Auditors Malaysia (IIAM)
- The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport Malaysia (CILTM)
- International Institution of Plantation Management (IIPM)

CORPORATE AFFILIATE

- Malaysian Institute of Human Resource Management (MIHRM)