A thief of health

Multiple sclerosis is a progressive disease that impairs speech, muscle control and vision.

Multiple sclerosis is a disease in which the covering of the nerves is gradually destroyed, impairing a person's speech, sight and ability to move.

The World Multiple Sclerosis Day event was put together by the Rotary Club of Bandar Sunway, Rotaract Club of Sunway University, Sunway University and the Multiple Sclerosis Society Malaysia.

Participation who were non-disabled were treated to several simulation exercises which gave them some idea of what it felt like to have some of the symptoms that persons with multiple sclerosis experienced.

For instance, there was the numbness simulation exercise in which participants had to write using very small pencils. This was done after something heavy was placed on their wrists to produce temporary numbness. Next came the "balancing act". Participants were made to walk in a straight line – something many multiple sclerosis patients find difficult to do. But first, the non-disabled participants were asked to wear their shoes on the wrong side of their feet. Not only that, they were made to jump and turn around a bit.

For the "poor vision" segment, participants were given goggles to use and carry out certain activities. It was great fun for the younger participants, especially. They came away with a better understanding of the challenges which persons with multiple sclerosis have to face everyday.

After the programme, Multiple Sclerosis Society Malaysia president Padma Parikker pointed out that the society has been conducting public awareness campaigns for more than five years, but last Sunday’s event was the best so far. "The participants had a great time, and they told me they had learnt so much by coming to the event," said Padma, 69, who has multiple sclerosis herself.

"I could see how the interaction with the multiple sclerosis patients had made a big impact on the students. Although everything was new to them, it did not stop many of them from mingling with our members and their caregivers and families," Padma, an advocate for multiple sclerosis, first contracted the disease over 40 years ago.

It started with a severe pain behind her head that got worse over time. She experienced walking difficulties, numbness in her hands and on the right side of her body, double vision, and incontinence.

Today, Padma takes daily medication to keep her symptoms under control. Occasionally she encounters a flare-up and has to be hospitalised. But Padma remains undaunted in her mission to promote awareness of the illness.

Multiple sclerosis is not easy to diagnose because its symptoms come and go. Some people have been known to wait almost a year before they view their condition with some degree of seriousness.

Recently, Padma was invited to guest on Astro’s Minveen Channel. It was her first time on the show.

"People need to know about multiple sclerosis. This is how we can create a better world for them until a cure is found," said Padma.