The Malaysian Node of the Human Variome Project (through the EduVariome Programme) provides knowledge transfer to the local community on genetic diseases including Thalassaemia. The aim is to create awareness about the importance of pre-marital genetic screening among the public, especially the youth. In Malaysia, thalassaemia is one of the most common genetic disease as 1 in 20 Malaysians are carriers of the β-thalassaemia trait. Therefore, educating the public on the importance of pre-marital genetic screening, and how it can affect future generations, is key to combating the disease.

EduVariome program at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Datuk Haji Ahmad Badawi, Penang, Malaysia

26th October 2017

Malaysian Node of the Human Variome Project (MyHVP) organised the EduVariome program at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Datuk Haji Ahmad Badawi, Penang, Malaysia with a participation of 150 form three students. A forum entitled “Can He Marry Me? Uncovering the need for Pre-Marital Genetic Screening” was held with Dr. Nik Norliza Nik Hassan, a lecturer of the School of Health Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia as the moderator. The panel of the forum were as follows:

i. Dr. Choo Chong Ming, Head of Paediatric Department of Sultan Abdul Halim Hospital, Sungai Petani, Kedah
ii. Associate Prof. Dr. Badrul Yahaya from Advanced Medical and Dental Institute (AMDI), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)
iii. Dr. Abdul Rahim Hussein from Advanced Medical and Dental Institute (AMDI), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)
iv. Mrs. Noorasyikin Md Saad, President of Thalassaemia Association, Penang

The panellists discussed the importance of pre-marital genetic screening and current issues on screening tests for thalassemia in Malaysia.

The program was officiated by head of MyHVP, Prof. Zilfalil Alwi. The program was organised to create an awareness campaign on thalassaemia to improve public understanding of the disease, especially among secondary school students. With the implementation of this program, students will gain knowledge on the importance of genetic screening in an effort to raise public awareness about thalassemia.
Those who have reached the age of 16 are strongly encouraged to go for thalassemia screening tests to prepare themselves towards an effort in decreasing this disorder in Malaysia. There are more than 7000 thalassemia patients registered under the Malaysian Ministry of Health. Most of the patients are Malay, Chinese and indigenous groups from the state of Sabah. Thalassemia major patients require blood transfusions throughout their life.

The program was attended by AMDI’s Deputy Director of Research and Innovation, Prof. Dr. Narazah Mohd Yusoff, who is also the Advisor for AMDI’s Eduvariome Project for AMDI and the Senior Assistant of Student Affairs, SMK Datuk Haji Ahmad Badawi, Mr Mohd Nazir Othman.