KOTA KINABALU: Twenty-six government hospital staff from across the state received training on handling emergency patients through the Sabah Trauma Life Support (STLS) course that started last Tuesday at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) here.

The three-day-course which was organized by the Emergency and Trauma Department of the Women and Children's Hospital Kota Kinabalu, and UiTM, aims to train doctors, paramedics and nurses in safe, effective and quality patient management and transfer, in order to keep up with the rising number of emergency patients, in time.

According to Sabah State Health Department director Dr Christina Rundi who was represented by the department's deputy director Dr Zuraidah Ahmad Babji, the emergency departments of 24 hospitals in Sabah received more than 900,000 patients in 2013.

During the course, trainers from the State Emergency Retrieval Unit (ERU) will cover essential aspects of patient retrieval and emergency medicine, including pre-hospital care and patient transport, basic trauma and disaster management, airway and resuscitation, and also transport safety tailored to local needs.

According to Christina, in spite of the availability of specialist care in secondary and tertiary health care centers, there were patients who die during transfer from the districts to these centers.

Health care workers also need to face challenging environment during patient-transfer process, and the distance from a district hospital to the closest hospital with specialists is on average a three-hour drive.

"There are 25 government hospitals throughout the state, including Lawas in Sarawak and the Federal Territory of Labuan, and treacherous terrains of rugged highlands and thick vegetation separating these hospitals make the inter-hospital patient transfer by ambulance a logistic nightmare," Christina added.

She then said the problem could be exacerbated by the route conditions that could be made worse by weather changes, and the personnel’s well-being and concentration could be affected which could reduce the effectiveness of the transfer team to monitor, stabilize or resuscitate the patient on the move.

“Ultimately, the journey becomes hazardous and may prove to be fatal,” she said in her speech.

With the hardship faced, the Emergency Medicine Society of Kota Kinabalu, with the assistance of CareFlight New South Wales and funding from the Australia Malaysia Institute, formed the STLS course four years ago.

The ERU is a dedicated and highly skilled group of well-trained individuals in the field of transport and aviation medicine. The squad comprises 15 people, including one emergency physician, a medical officer and an assistant medical officer from the Emergency and Trauma Department, Sabah Women and Children's Hospital.
UI TM lecturer Dr Rozita @ Uji Mohamed (left) presenting a token of appreciation to Dr Zuraidah Ahmad Babii.