

Medical treatment can wait till after the financial crisis: S'poreans

Neo Chai Chin

Today, 28 June 2010

SINGAPORE — In an economic downturn, one might cut down on restaurant dining or defer his retirement plans. But medical treatment?

The Institute of Policy Studies survey assessing the resilience of Singaporeans to last year's economic crisis threw up a potentially worrying statistic: One in five (21 per cent) of the 2,109 respondents aged 21 and above said the crisis would affect their decision to have medical treatment — if it has not done so already.

Medical treatment was the second most-cited “life choice” affected by the crisis in the survey, conducted over December and January.

The most impacted life choice was leisure, with four in 10 respondents saying the crisis had affected their decisions.

The survey did not differentiate between medical treatment that was urgent or non-urgent, or for serious or minor ailments.

The finding is thus worrying only if Singaporeans were neglecting necessary treatment, said social work Associate Professor Ngiam Tee Liang.

“Then we'll worry about longer term consequences because the illness could get more serious, treatment could get more expensive. And we don't want that to happen as far as possible,” he said.

In a similar survey by IPS in February last year — when Singapore was in the thick of the economic gloom — a similar proportion of respondents (22 per cent) had mentioned the crisis affecting their medical treatment decisions.

But it was only the sixth most-cited area, with more respondents saying their career plans, retirement plans, personal education plans, and children's education plans were being affected.