Team to avert gambling woes

15-member council named to stop Singaporeans from becoming addicted

BY BEN NADARAJAN

THE man who has led the fight against drug addiction for years now has the task of ensuring Singaporeans do not get hooked on gambling.

Mr Lim Hock San, chairman of the National Council Against Drug Abuse, will head a 15-member committee set up by the Government to look into gambling addiction.

The National Council on Problem Gambling’s main task will be advising the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) on public education programmes and messages to promote awareness of gambling addiction.

The ministry has set aside $1 million to fund these programmes.

The council will also have a say in which preventive and rehabilitative programmes to fund. Members will study the available treatment and counselling programmes and recommend the best.

The Government undertook in April to set up the council after it gave the green light for the establishment of two integrated resorts with casinos.

MCYS officers yesterday briefed council members on their roles and the likely issues they will have to tackle.

Mr Lim, the president and chief executive officer of United Industrial Corporation Ltd, said the council’s immediate priority was to raise public awareness of the ills of gambling.

“We also intend to inform the public on the various community and professional help services available, so that those facing problems related to gambling will know where to go for help,” he said.

“Although the casinos are not up and running yet, we still have a lot of people gambling. “So we need to spread the word early that obsessive gambling is harmful to the individual and to his family as well.”

The council will also decide who should be kept out of casinos when the integrated resorts open their doors in 2009. But details of how such an exclusion policy would work will only be discussed and decided on nearer the time the first dice are rolled in the casinos, said Mr Lim, 58.

The council is made up of members with a range of expertise and experience in fields such as public communications, psychiatry, psychology, counselling and rehabilitative services.

One member, Fairfield Methodist Secondary School principal Elaine Lim, feels her involvement with students will be a “good platform” to devise ideas on educating youths on the ills of gambling.

Another member, Reverend Edward Job of the Christian Outreach Centre, volunteered because he had seen many desperate gambling addicts who had turned to loan sharks, and felt he needed to help.

“I want to help these people by raising their problems and concerns with the council so we can better make our decisions,” he said.

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