First antiviral herbal product against dengue out soon

PETALING JAYA: Malaysia is on the brink of a potential breakthrough in a plant-based antiviral preparation against dengue.

The herbal product, the first of its kind in the country and probably the world, is soon to be registered with the Drug Control Authority as, initially, a herbal product for fever.

Known as Dengimm, it is a constituted local plant extract (CLPE) derived from a combination of eight herbal plants, including artemisia.

The plant extracts were supplied to University Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC) by Autoimmune Sdn Bhd following a memorandum of understanding signed between the hospital and the company in 2004.

At present, there is no vaccine or antiviral drug for dengue worldwide although research is being done in several countries, including the United States, India and Thailand.

UMMC medical microbiology head of department Prof Dr Sazaly Abu Bakar, who headed the five-member research team, said Dengimm had been tested on infected cells and in mice with encouraging results.

"It means that the herbal product could possibly help victims suffering from dengue fever. It can be used against the virus.

"It's an alternative approach for the early treatment of dengue."

However, there is still a series of tests to be done before it could be used on humans.

Dr Sazaly said the cost to conduct pre-clinical studies would run into a few million ringgit and the research team would have to get a Food and Drug Administration approval before embarking on clinical trials.

Dr Sazaly and his team of four microbiologists - Suzana Misbah, Nor Aziyah Mat Rahim, Juraina Abd Jamil and Sook-San Wong - took three years to make their first breakthrough.

He said the next move was to do clinical trials on humans and there were sufficient facilities for this at UMMC.