



PRESS STATEMENT

“MOH Tells Contract Doctors To Pay Own Way For Specialisation”

17 July 2020 – This statement is released in response to the written Parliamentary reply provided by the Minister of Health Dr Adham Baba on the 13th of July 2020 to the question raised by Tangga Batu MP Rusnah Aluai pertaining to the job security and welfare of contract doctors. MMI Doctors would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to both MPs for bringing up this issue concerning junior doctors in the Dewan Rakyat.

We acknowledge the implementation of the contract system as a necessary step for the long term operating sustainability of the civil service. Nevertheless, numerous issues have surrounded the change in staff employment policy despite the efforts of multiple Ministers of Health. The matter is currently under the purview of Dr Adham Baba, and it is our sincere hope that the team under the guidance of Dr Adham would be able to steer this matter to a desirable resolution.

On the 13th July 2020, the Ministry of Health through its Parliamentary reply called for contract doctors to pay for their postgraduate specialty training themselves as they are ineligible for the Hadiah Latihan Persekutuan (HLP). Here, we would like to raise our six arguments and provide several suggestions to the Ministry on how to support our junior doctors in attaining specialty training:

1. Provide contract tenures which are adequate for candidates to complete their specialty training.

Our junior doctors are currently provided with a 5-year contract package (a 3-year contract with an option of a 2-year extension). Junior doctors begin their careers as house officers and commonly complete their Housemanship training within 2 years and subsequently take on the role and responsibility of medical officers. Postgraduate specialty training typically requires a minimum of 4 years, which may only begin following the completion of Housemanship. The current situation means that even if doctors are able to pay for their own

specialization training, they may not be able to complete it as their contract tenure falls short of the required training period. Hence, we urge the government to consider longer contract tenures to allow completion of postgraduate specialty training for junior doctors.

2. Introducing alternatives or assistance in funding specialty training for doctors.

It is costly for doctors to undergo speciality training without assistance, more so when training opportunities are provided by institutions outside Malaysia. A conservative estimation would see the person paying over RM 15,000 in examination fees alone, without taking into account course materials, workshop/training attendances, and also travel fees to the examination location. It is our suggestion that other forms of scholarship apart from the HLP, as well as opportunities to obtain financial assistance from the National Higher Education Fund Corporation, more commonly known in its Malay abbreviation PTPTN, are made available for contract doctors.

3. Provide clear statistics regarding specialist numbers in Malaysia

The Ministry of Health should provide statistics on the breakdown on numbers of specialists for the various specialties currently available, and numbers which are required by the nation. We often read about lamentations on the shortage of, for example, psychiatrists, oncologists, and cardiologists in the nation. By providing such information, our junior doctors could direct their specialisation efforts towards specialties which are lacking in numbers.

4. Set up transparent and standardized admission criteria for postgraduate specialty training of doctors.

The newly introduced Medical Specialist Pre-Entrance examination (MedEx) may be a good way forward in streamlining candidates with potential for specialty training.

5. The numbers of training spots available for the different specialties in each University should be made transparent to provide a clear picture of the nation's capacity for postgraduate specialty training

6. Introduce a national healthcare scheme to balance service provision

Although a public-private partnership is welcomed, the reality is that a major portion of healthcare provision is provided by the public healthcare sector. Without the introduction of a national healthcare scheme to balance service provision, it is not practical to propose for the private sector's involvement in postgraduate specialty training.

Contract doctors, despite being allowed to fund their specialty training by themselves, are facing many uncertainties leading to confusion and frustration. Their salaries remain stagnant at the UD41 pay grade, which is approximately RM8,000 less per year compared to that received by permanent medical officers despite them taking on the same responsibilities and workload. Moreover, information on possible contract extensions beyond the expiry of their initial 5-year contract package is not forthcoming, while reports such as contract doctors being sidelined to make way for 23,928 permanent medical officers in obtaining HLP is indeed demoralizing.

We believe that the vision of the Ministry of Health in achieving a holistic and sustainable healthcare system in Malaysia, in the long run, can be materialised by implementing a transparent and proper employment system, including the employment of junior doctors.

MMI Doctors has faith in the leadership of the Honorable Minister of Health, YB Dr Adham Baba, and the team from the Ministry of Health in engaging with all stakeholders to come up with a desirable resolution in the near future.

Thank you.

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Term 2019/2020

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About the Organization

Malaysian Medics International, or MMI, was founded in 2013. With its rapid expansion and growing successes, MMI is anchored in its three pillars: to connect, to educate and to cultivate. We are dedicated to providing a professional environment for Malaysian medics to network, keep themselves updated with healthcare issues and develop skills essential for their career. The group also provides information and advice to prospective Malaysians who wish to pursue a medical degree through MMI Young Medics, a chapter for premedical students. MMI also looks into issues affecting Malaysian medical graduates and junior doctors through its other chapter, MMI Doctors. MMI currently has branches in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand. We hope that this organisation will be a strong platform for us to voice out our opinions and views regarding healthcare issues and policy in Malaysia.