

Press Statement

“Rationalise Bond for Contract Doctors on JPA Scholarship”

5th August 2020 - This statement is released in response to the Alor Setar MP Chan Ming Kai calling for the government to reduce the punitive 10-year bond for contract doctors on Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam (JPA) Scholarships in view of their predicament of being unable to continue their specialist training during their bonded years of service in the government hospital without the option to quit to join the private sector.

The problem arises when the contract system for the employment of doctors in the public sector was introduced in 2017. With uncertainties surrounding the contract system, contract medical officers serving the bond are unable to pursue speciality training. This has put these medical officers in a tight position whereby they are unable to break their bond with JPA, while they are also financially incapable of paying for their postgraduate training.

Therefore, we call upon the JPA and the Ministry of Health to consider the following recommendations:

1. Release from the bond with no monetary compensation for JPA in the event that no further contract or an extension can be provided by the government to JPA scholars to serve in a public hospital

As mentioned, JPA scholars are required to serve as medical doctors in the healthcare sector for an average of 5 to 10 years after the completion of their studies. In the event where they are unable to fulfil their contractual obligation for completion of service time, these medical officers are required to pay monetary compensation to JPA. This is an issue because:

- 1.1. The contract system was not in place when most of these scholars accepted the scholarship.
- 1.2. JPA scholars prior to the introduction of the contract system for employment were under the impression that they will be able to complete the 10-year service term with the government.
- 1.3. At present, JPA scholars are not guaranteed a contract or an extension of their existing contract beyond the tenure, which will affect their servicing of the bond.

Herewith we acknowledge that the government has taken the steps to assist in the servicing of their bond with the introduction of STAR-Talentcorp initiative. Nevertheless, this poses another issue because:

- 1.4. JPA Scholars are unable to complete their postgraduate training and be recognised in their field of speciality due to the requirements for specialist doctor registration in Malaysia.
- 1.5. Specialisation training can only be done either through the local Master's programme, which contract doctors are not eligible for as they do not qualify for Hadiah Latihan Persekutuan at present, or the

external pathway, which requires training to be done in certain government accredited institutions, most of which are public hospitals.

2. **Provide transparency and clarity of terms in scholarship and loan contract**

There is ambiguity surrounding the repayment of JPA Scholarships and loans. Additionally, there were no clear terms provided in any contracts regarding this repayment. Recent undergraduates (who are JPA scholars from the 2016 batch) from other fields have recently been informed to partially repay their loan while working in the public sector. The only thing that may have alluded scholars to this situation was the mention that the loan will be converted to a scholarship and exempted from paying back if they work with the government after graduation for the agreed duration stated in the contract.

3. **Allow sufficient time for procurement of job before warranting payback of the loan**

JPA scholars under the new loan contract since 2016 are required to pay back their loan within 6 months of completing their undergraduate studies, or on employment, whichever first. However, the current waiting period for housemanship averages from 4 to 10 months. This is illogical as there is gravely insufficient time given to secure a job within the public healthcare sector, as the housemanship post availability varies largely depending on the government. If the government is unable to provide a job for the medical undergraduates within those 6 months, medical undergraduates should not be forced to repay the loan. This will be extremely challenging and near impossible for fresh medical graduates who required the loan to pursue their medical degree in the first place. We hope that JPA would allocate a minimum of 12 months for JPA scholars to secure a job.

In conclusion, MMI urges JPA and the MOH to address these burgeoning issues by engaging with all the relevant stakeholders based on our recommendations. We hope that with further improvement and clarity to the current system, our medical doctors will be able to contribute to the Malaysian healthcare system without being burdened by the constant woes for their financial wellbeing and job securities.

Thank you.

MALAYSIAN MEDICS INTERNATIONAL

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About Malaysian Medics International (MMI)

MMI is an international medical student-led organisation that aims to connect, educate, and cultivate. Since our inception in 2013, we have grown into a global network of more than 200 leaders from eight countries around the world. Presently, we are an active advocate for inclusivity and diversity, reform in medical education, and a fairer deal for our doctors.

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