



## Press Statement

### “A Response to The Formation of Cabinet”

**4th December 2022** - In response to the recent formation of the Malaysian Cabinet, Malaysian Medics International (MMI) wishes to express our support and heartfelt gratitude to the newly appointed health minister, Dr Zaliha Mustafa, for pledging to address pressing healthcare issues involving the placement of graduate doctors and matters pertaining to medical infrastructure and services.<sup>1</sup> While we fervently anticipate the Ministry of Health’s upcoming plans, we wish to highlight several pertinent issues that require further consideration as we strive for a more equitable and responsive healthcare system.

MMI acknowledges and supports the health-positive initiatives implemented by the previous Ministry of Health, including the increase in budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Health, the formation of a Healthcare Work Culture Improvement Task Force (HWCITF), and the increase in permanent positions to contract doctors. In the interim, we humbly call on the Ministry of Health, other relevant stakeholders and distinguished policymakers to consider the following:

**1. Improve the availability of scholarships for Master's & Parallel Pathway Programme to contract doctors**

MMI welcomes the awarding of *Program Latihan Kepakaran (PLK)* with a Ministry of Health (MoH) Scholarship for 216 contract officers (medical & dental) to undergo medical specialisation, dental specialisation and parallel pathway programmes for the 2023/24 academic session.<sup>2</sup> While we applaud that contract officers make up about 16% of the 1,347 scholarship award recipients in 2022, we call upon the Ministry of Health to further break down the number of contract officers receiving scholarship awards under each of the three categories mentioned above, such as the number of contract medical officers receiving PLK for medical specialisation and parallel pathway respectively and vice versa for contract dental officers.<sup>2</sup> This will ensure better transparency and understanding of the awarding of such scholarship awards for healthcare workers and the general public.

Besides, MMI also acknowledges that the number of contract officers receiving PLK with an MoH scholarship (216) is a far cry from the “up to 3,000” positions as allocated under Budget 2022.<sup>3</sup> First, we would like to seek the MoH’s clarification regarding this matter and its plan to mitigate this matter. Second, while we sincerely appreciate the MoH’s effort in awarding scholarship awards for contract healthcare officers for the first time since the contract is implemented, we urge the MoH to apply for higher allocation under the new Budget 2023 (post-GE-15) to continue awarding more scholarship awards to contract medical officers, to tackle the issue of insufficient medical specialists in Malaysia 3.9 specialists per 10,000 population (as of June 20, 2020) as compared to 14.3 specialists per 10,000 population in OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) average in 2018.<sup>4</sup>

2. **Evaluate and address shortages of medical specialists in the public health sector**

MMI recommends MoH and policymakers to re-evaluate the retention strategies of trained physicians and specialists. This includes but is not limited to assessing the motivations behind Malaysian medical students' decision to study and subsequently work abroad and the preferences of trained medical specialists to work in the private healthcare sector. As quoted by former health minister Khairy Jamaluddin, 28,000 medical specialists are needed by 2030 as Malaysia heads towards becoming an ageing nation.<sup>5</sup> In addition, we urge that the health sector will be provided with a comprehensive allocation in *Bajet 2023* to support the notion of increasing permanent employees.

3. **Improve the quality of the National Postgraduate Training Programme curriculum**

MMI welcomes the notion of improving the curriculum of the National Postgraduate Training Programme to enhance the quality of medical professionals as outlined in the Twelfth Malaysian Plan. The incorporation of emerging technology in the health sector will simultaneously provide a robust training environment for postgraduates and catapult the accessibility of healthcare services to the *rakyat*.<sup>6</sup> We encourage the MoH to explore the possibilities of leasing medical equipment to facilitate procurement and the biomedical engineering sector to conduct research and development on new medical technologies for our local hospitals.

In addition, MMI also supports the former health minister's plan to strengthen the National Expertise Studies Program. This includes establishing a professional qualification examination to address issues of graduate quality and competence, as well as establishing technical committees for the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery as well as Bachelor of Dental Surgery to maximise offering capacity, control the quality of graduates from these programs, evaluation and updating of the Second Schedule of the Medical Act 1971.<sup>7</sup>

4. **Review existing guidelines and policies on managing junior doctors with mental health conditions**

To echo the plight of junior doctors, MMI urges that the government appraise existing training and scoring evaluations. Stringent time frames for junior doctors to complete their training, particularly housemen, is one of the many reasons that deter housemen from actively seeking professional help catering to their mental health needs; thereby, potentially jeopardising quality patient care.<sup>8</sup> In the best interest of all parties, we recommend that the MoH implements policies that adequately address and support junior doctors with mental health conditions which include but are not limited to, the permission of short-term mental health leaves, eligibility to hold non-clinical roles during the housemanship training period and establishment of mental health support services to provide a seamless transition into one's clinical duties. MMI also acknowledges the allocation of budget to the Ministry of Health in the previous Budget 2022, which is to arrange the additional personal income tax exemptions on medical expenses incurred when consulting or receiving treatment from psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and registered counsellors.<sup>9</sup>

5. **Improve the welfare of contract doctors undergoing housemanship training or the compulsory service period**

Unlike their peers who have permanent positions in the MoH, contract doctors are not entitled to apply for unrecorded leave and special children's sick leave. Currently, the categories of unrecorded leave for government employees include three days for the death of family members including parents-in-law, ninety days of maternity leave, and seven days of paternity leave.<sup>10</sup> We applaud the former Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin, for announcing that the cabinet had agreed to the upgrading of the benefits of contract doctors which included special medical duty leave, TB leave and allowance to visit their place of origin.<sup>11</sup> However, we urge MoH to consider additional leave benefits namely hazard leave, cancer leave and special children sick-leave to be granted to contract doctors.

Furthermore, MMI implores the MoH to enforce the mandatory weekly working hour regulation for junior doctors to safeguard their well-being. While a MoH circular in 2019 detailed that the weekly working hours of junior doctors were to be reduced to 60 - 62 hours, this has not been implemented by the majority of the hospitals with junior doctors reporting working more than the stipulated hours with consistently long overtime stretches.<sup>12,13</sup> Working under such strenuous circumstances with high expectations to perform effectively will inevitably result in dire consequences for both the medical professionals and the *rakyat*; therefore, we humbly plead that equitable treatment is provided to every doctor as they are unanimously carrying out the same duty of providing care for the *rakyat*.

In conclusion, MMI appreciates the effort that the government has demonstrated in mitigating various healthcare issues. As we step into a new era, we urge the government to consider our requests alongside future plans to safeguard the sustainability of the future of our healthcare system.

Thank you.

**MALAYSIAN MEDICS INTERNATIONAL**  
TERM 2022/2023

**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 seven countries around the world. Presently, we are an active advocate for inclusivity and diversity, reform in medical education, and the welfare of our junior doctors and medical students.

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