

MMA ‘Extremely Furious’ At MOH-JPA’s ‘Negligence’ In Doctor Relocations

By CodeBlue | 13 July 2023

MMA slams the doctor relocation exercise by MOH and JPA as “negligence at the highest level” that is risking patients’ lives. Public hospitals like Melaka Hospital, Serdang Hospital and Miri Hospital are losing 80-100 senior MOs each, without replacements.



A house officer (in red), medical assistants (in light green and in purple), and medical students (in white coat) attending to patients at Melaka Hospital's emergency and trauma department (Yellow Zone). Photo by Saw Siow Feng, taken on June 26, 2023.

KUALA LUMPUR, July 13 – The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) today harshly condemned the disruptive relocation of government doctors for permanent placements that it described as “negligence at the highest level”.

The country's largest doctors' association noted that several public hospitals – such as Melaka Hospital, Selangor's Serdang Hospital, and Sarawak's Miri Hospital – would not be receiving any medical officers in the nationwide relocation exercise, but would instead, on average, each lose 80 to 100 senior medical officers who have undergone training for many years.

In an internal memo dated last June 30, Melaka Hospital's medical department said that as a department that provides the largest inpatient and outpatient services in the general hospital, "the shortage of medical officers will generally affect patient treatment, including the length of time to see patients in wards and patients' waiting time in medical clinics".

Hence, Melaka Hospital's medical department has decided to limit reviews to Red Zone (critical) cases at the emergency unit and to only accept emergency interdepartmental referrals. "Non-emergency cases can be referred to the relevant specialist clinic or nearby public health clinics (*klinik kesihatan*)."

CodeBlue reported last Monday that Melaka Hospital has suspended its iFOBT (immunochemical faecal occult blood test) colorectal cancer screening service and is looking to halve the number of elective surgeries offered, due to the shortage of doctors resulting from relocations out of the state. Melaka was completely omitted from the eHousemen system for medical officers' permanent placements, allegedly due to a "blunder".

"The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) is extremely furious with the seemingly inept and ineffective organisation planning of the Ministry of Health's (MOH) Human Resource Department (BSM) and the Public Service Department (JPA)," MMA president Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai said in a statement.

MMA said it has also received reports from medical officers that they have yet to receive their official letter of placement, less than three weeks from the day to report for duty by July 31.

These doctors were also reportedly informed that they could not apply for a postponement of reporting for duty.

MMA described this as "incredibly inappropriate", saying that medical officers need enough time to make arrangements for accommodation and travel, especially if they are required to relocate hundreds to thousands of kilometres away from their current location.

"This follows a series of high stakes mistakes involving both the JPA and the BSM. These failures have caused significant problems to the rakyat, and also to the welfare of our healthcare workers. This is negligence at the highest level," MMA said.

“If it had been doctors making mistakes of negligence, there would be an inquiry, and possible suspensions of practising licence. Similar action must be taken on ineffective officials in the JPA and BSM offices. Should the penalty for failures at the policy level, which affect millions of Malaysians, not be higher?”

MMA alleged that the manpower shortage across public health care facilities – triggered by the nationwide relocation of approximately 4,000 contract medical officers who recently received permanent positions – was caused by “incompetence” in MOH’s BSM and JPA.

“There is little or no damage control seen as the situation worsens, affecting patient care, a basic human right. We call on the health minister to take immediate steps to address the poor planning and handling of MO (medical officer) transfers that are affecting health care services in many of the public health care facilities throughout the country.”

Three days on, Health Minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa has yet to address *CodeBlue*’s report on Melaka’s medical staffing crisis, particularly in Melaka Hospital that has already begun cutting services.

MMA also demanded today a one-month grace period from the letter of transfer to the reporting date for all doctors.

“Reopen the e-HO system to ensure equal distribution of manpower across the country. Come up with a staggered distribution system so that no health care facility will experience a shortage of health care workers.”

Additionally, MMA told the MOH to provide real-time data, updated periodically, on health manpower in its hospitals.

“We urge the government to do better, for the lives and health of our rakyat are at stake,” Dr Muruga said.