

Doctors must lead Malaysia's health policy, says new MMA president

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The Malaysian Medical Association's (MMA) newly elected president, Datuk Dr R. Thirunavukarasu, has called for doctors to be recognised as leaders in safeguarding national health and shaping the country's healthcare policies. - PIC COURTESY OF MMA

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Medical Association's (MMA) newly elected president, Datuk Dr R. Thirunavukarasu, has called for doctors to be recognised as leaders in safeguarding national health and shaping the country's healthcare policies.

Dr Thirunavukarasu, who succeeds Datuk Dr Kalwinder Singh Khaira, will serve a one-year term as head of the country's largest medical body.

He pledged to prioritise three key commitments, beginning with empowering doctors, ensuring that every practitioner — from those in rural clinics to tertiary hospitals and academic institutions — is acknowledged for their role in advancing healthcare.

"MMA will advocate for fair policies, from general practitioners' fees to contract positions, from third-party administrator practices to

medico-legal reforms. We will push for changes that restore fairness and sustainability.

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"Secondly, we will reclaim professional autonomy. Doctors must not only be present at the decision-making table but also be meaningfully engaged. Our expertise must shape policy, not merely endorse it. Symbolic inclusion without influence weakens both trust and outcomes," he said in a statement today.

Dr Thirunavukarasu said that house officers continued to face serious challenges, including long hours, excessive workloads and hostile working environments.

While the zero-bullying policy is a positive step, he said that it would remain only a statement unless enforced with transparency and accountability.

He also urged the timely implementation of the long-awaited revision of on-call allowances, warning that recognition delayed was too often perceived as recognition denied.

On the private sector, Dr Thirunavukarasu highlighted the threat to the sustainability of primary care posed by outdated fee schedules, rising costs and the practices of third-party administrators.

"If Malaysia is to achieve affordable and accessible healthcare, private clinics must remain sustainable. Without them, more patients will flood government facilities that are already under strain," he said.

He added that fees for private specialists remained tied to the outdated Thirteenth Schedule under the Private Healthcare Facilities and Services Act, leaving both patients and specialists facing uncertainty.

He called for procedure codes and fee schedules to be updated to reflect current practice,

ensuring that charges are fair, transparent and sustainable.