



LETTER | Pilot shift system for doctors a cause for concern

Malaysian Medical Association

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LETTER | The Health Ministry's *Waktu Berkerja Berlainan* (WBB) shift system to pilot in seven hospitals from Feb 1 has raised significant concerns among healthcare workers.

While aimed at reducing working hours and improving conditions, its implementation risks further burdening an already overstretched public healthcare system.

It will also affect the income of public healthcare medical officers (MOs) and specialists as the ministry's announced increase in on-call allowance will only be applicable for WBB on-call shifts on weekends and public holidays.

While those on the WBB on-call shift system will work fewer hours on-call, they will stand to lose income from the loss of weekday on-call allowance claims.

Under The WBB shift system, there is no allowance for working past 5pm on weekdays. Graveyard shifts are treated as regular work hours included as part of the 45-hour work week.

Furthermore, there is not enough manpower on the ground to be in a position to reduce work hours. Before we can even consider reducing any work hours, the manpower issues (healthcare worker maldistribution and shortages) which have persisted nationwide, must first be resolved.

Addressing manpower shortage

At the moment, the distribution of our healthcare workforce is struggling to manage the high workloads. It needs to be noted that over 70 percent of the population relies on public healthcare services.

Any reduction in work hours without addressing manpower shortages will impact inpatient care and the running of clinics and other services in the hospital.

We hope that the Medical Advisory and Action Committee who prepared the guidelines will further engage with clinicians and other stakeholders on the ground on the feasibility of implementing the modified shift working system for medical officers.

Last but not least, we call on the government to immediately implement its announced increase in on-call allowance across all public healthcare facilities, regardless of shift system.

As it stands, those hospitals and departments that cannot implement the WBB due to manpower shortages will see their doctors not benefitting at all. This risks further demoralising an already overworked workforce.

The on-call allowance which has not seen an increase for more than a decade, serves as compensation for medical officers and specialists, recognising their dedication and sacrifices in delivering 24-hour healthcare services every day to meet the needs of the population.

The doctors who had been eagerly awaiting the good news on the on-call increase as announced by the health minister and also the prime minister during the Budget 2025 presentation last year, are now disappointed and upset.

In addition, manpower shortages that will limit the feasibility of new systems like WBB should be addressed and stakeholders engaged.

Only then can we move on to meaningful reforms that will benefit both healthcare workers and the public.