

New on-call shift system will affect incomes of public medical officers, specialist, says MMA

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PETALING JAYA: The income of public healthcare medical officers and specialists will be affected through the implementation of the Waktu Bekerja Berlainan (WBB) pilot shift system, says the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA).

While aimed at reducing working hours and improving working conditions, MMA president Datuk Dr Kalwinder Singh Khaira argued that the increased on-call allowances would only be applicable for WBB on-call shifts on weekends and public holidays in reference to the Health Ministry's recent circular.

"While those on the WBB on-call shift system will work fewer on-call hours, they will stand to lose income due to being unable to make weekday on-call allowance claims.

"Under the WBB shift system, there is also no allowance for working past 5pm on weekdays.

"Graveyard shifts are treated as regular working hours and included as part of the 45-hour work week," he said in a statement on Wednesday (Jan 15).

Dr Kalwinder said there is still insufficient manpower on the ground, adding that this will make it difficult to implement the WBB system.

"Manpower issues of healthcare worker maldistribution and shortages must be resolved first.

"At the moment, the current healthcare distribution of our healthcare workforce is struggling to manage the high workloads.

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

He further urged the Health Ministry's Medical Advisory and Action Committee to further engage with clinicians and other stakeholders on the ground.

"We call on the government to immediately implement this announced increase in on-call allowance across all public healthcare facilities, regardless of shift system.

"As it stands, hospitals and departments that cannot implement it due to manpower shortages will leave their doctors without any benefit," he said.

Dr Kalwinder said 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, recognizing their dedication and sacrifices in delivering 24-hour healthcare services daily," he said, adding that doctors eagerly awaiting for good news have instead been left disappointed and upset.

"Address manpower shortages and engage stakeholders. Only then can we move on to meaningful reforms that will benefit both healthcare workers and the public," he said.

This comes after the Health Ministry's plans to implement a pilot run for a new shift system for doctors and dentists at selected government healthcare facilities.

This will see shift hours being capped at 18 hours.

As per the announcement under Budget 2025 the on-call allowance rate has been increased to RM55 to RM65.

Under the WBB system however, the take home pay for doctors and dentists will be less as they will only be able to claim for active calls on weekend and public holiday and not weekday shifts.