

A timely boost to doctors' morale

By **MARTIN CARVALHO**

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PETALING JAYA: The move to do away with contract doctors will provide a better sense of job security for young doctors serving in government hospitals, ending years of anxiety, say stakeholders.

Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Datuk Dr Kalwinder Singh Khaira said hiring doctors on a permanent scheme would also pave the way for more students to take up medicine.

“We are happy that steps are underway to resolve the contract doctor system.

“The employment of doctors under the permanent scheme will provide job security and planned career progression for the new doctors.

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“This will in turn also help encourage students to take up medicine as a profession and also will be key to improving retention of doctors within the healthcare system,” he said when contacted yesterday.

He said there is a need for more doctors and specialists to address the shortage in the public healthcare workforce.

He said the retention of doctors under a permanent scheme would also help the nation meet the growing challenges posed by non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and an ageing population.

The MMA had earlier called for the contract doctor system to be abolished.

The medical body had also raised the matter during its previous interactions with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Dr Kalwinder was responding to Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad’s comment that efforts to abolish the contract system for government doctors are being looked into.

Public health expert Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin said the abolishment of the contract system is long overdue.

“This move addresses a critical, years-long grievance within the healthcare workforce.

“The creation of permanent positions will finally provide thousands of junior doctors with the needed job security and career stability which they have desperately lacked since 2016.

“This will put an end to years of anxiety faced by the affected doctors with regard to the renewal of their of contracts,” he said.

Dr Zainal added that offering permanent posts is the most effective way to retain skilled Malaysian doctors within the public system.

“This significantly curbs the brain drain of frustrated contract doctors seeking better prospects overseas or in the private sector,” he said.

Converting contract doctors to permanent staff, he added, will also improve the morale and commitment of doctors serving with the government.

“A stable, valued workforce is fundamental to building a more resilient and sustainable public healthcare system for the long term,” he added.

Dr Zainal cautioned that the success of introducing permanent employment of doctor lies with its execution of the scheme.

“Concerns remain about whether enough permanent posts will be created promptly and allocated fairly based on merit, avoiding further delays or perceived bias,” he said.

He noted that the move to do away with the contract system will not automatically solve the severe lack of specialist training posts which the ministry must also urgently address.

When contacted, Hartal Doktor Kontrak spokesman Dr Muhammad Yassin hoped that the assurance given by Dzulkefly would not be merely “lip service”.

“It has to be backed by real intentions and determination by those in power to solve this long-standing issue which had contributed to the bleeding healthcare services that the country is facing right now,” he said.

Parliament’s Special Select Committee on Health chairman Suhaizan Kaiat said the government’s proposal to end the contract doctor system will improve the national healthcare system.