

MMA chief right where she needs to be

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PETALING JAYA: Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz, who was elected on Sept 8, has her work cut out for her.

Apart from looking into the well-being of public healthcare workers, she will also focus on tackling issues faced by the medical profession, including general practitioners (GP).

Having graduated with an MBBS degree from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in 1986, she served in both public and private hospitals before becoming a general practitioner in 1999.

She was also MMA Wilayah branch first female chairman from 2010 to 2012, as well as the MMA honorary deputy and honorary general treasurer.

Azizan told *theSun* she is passionate about addressing non-communicable diseases and is a firm believer in the role of nutrition and lifestyle interventions for better patient outcomes.

"I have always wanted to contribute to improving the healthcare system and the quality of care in the country, and I have been doing this through my active involvement in the MMA since 1986.

"But I am in a much better position to do so now, through deeper and more meaningful engagement with my colleagues and the Health Ministry on issues facing public and private healthcare."

Azizan said it is important to keep the best and brightest talents as junior doctors today would become the senior doctors and specialists of tomorrow.

Furthermore, a high percentage of the population depends on public healthcare, so it is vital to prioritise their well-being.

Among her priorities are issues concerning the well-being of healthcare workers, contract doctors, the maldistribution of doctors, and the shortage of specialists.

Others are doctors' remuneration, junior doctor's career pathways, work environment, work-life balance, and digitalisation of the healthcare system.

"The GP fee schedule and Third Party Administrator issues are the main ones in private healthcare, which I hope to discuss with the Health Ministry soon," she said.

Through meetings with the ministry and press statements, the MMA has expressed concern over the well-being of healthcare professionals, in particular their burnout due to overwork, she said.

"Public healthcare workers are overworked due to their maldistribution, shortages in personnel across the board and high volumes of patients.

"The workload is much higher now compared with five or 10 years ago as the population and its healthcare needs have increased.

"The demand for healthcare in 2030 is expected to further increase as Malaysia will reach ageing nation status where 15% of our population will be 60 years and above."

She said healthcare allocations under Budget 2024 need to be improved when it is tabled soon. As the government works to increase the salaries of civil servants, healthcare workers should not be neglected either.

The working hours also need to be looked into urgently to ensure optimal performance and a healthy work-life balance, she added.

Azizan said current consultation fee limits for private GPs are set under Schedule 7 of the Private Healthcare Facilities and Services Act of 1998.

"The Act needs urgent deregulation as private GPs can only charge between RM10 and RM35 for consultation, while medical officers on the same level as GPs in terms of qualification in private hospitals can charge between RM30 and RM125 under Schedule 13.

"The MMA set these rates in 1992 as a guide. However, the Health Ministry legislated it in 2006. These rates should be updated from time to time, but this has not happened," Azizan said.