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'Allow clinics to dispense OTC medicine'

BY CHRISTINA CHIN and YUEN MEIKENG

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has objected to the action taken against doctors who dispense simple over-the-counter (OTC) medication in their clinics.

Such an action by the Health Ministry's pharmacy enforcement unit (PEU) was causing inconvenience to patients, said MMA president Dr Ravindran R. Naidu.

"If sundry shops, traditional Chinese medicine shops and convenience stores can sell OTC medication like paracetamol, why can't clinics?" he asked.

Dr Ravindran said many patients bought drugs from pharmacies without a prescription or being reviewed by doctors.

"It's far more dangerous when pharmacists dispense controlled drugs without a prescription."

There should be discussions with the ministry to ensure regulations are clear, he added.

His comments came in the wake of a letter sent to the ministry's top officials, complaining about "victimisation" by the pharmacy enforcement unit.

It is learned that the letter was sent by an organisation representing doctors (not MMA).

The letter dated Monday detailed the "heavy-handed action" taken in the last six months by the unit in raiding their clinics.

"PEU officers are even calling up our patients and asking all sorts of questions. The patients are anxious and it creates mistrust between them and their doctor," said a source.

Previously, he said there was no issue with patients who got their medicine from the clinic without being examined.

"Now, it's a problem," the source added.

The Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia president Dr Peter Chan spoke out against cases where the PEU made police reports against doctors

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declined to divulge patients' details.

He said patients' cards at clinics should not be confiscated nor patients be contacted by the PEU.

The Private Health Care Facilities and Services Act states that patient information can only leave the clinic by way of a court order.

Such details are also protected under the Medical Act and Personal Data Protection Act, he added.

As for the role of doctors and pharmacists in dispensing medication, Dr Chan called for the definition of "patient" to be clarified.

Since 1952, the Poisons Act has allowed patients to buy medicine from clinics, he said.

"Now, after 55 years, we're told we cannot be in retail as Section 19 limits the sale of medicine to a doctor's patient."

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GPs , doctors , victimised , dispensing separation

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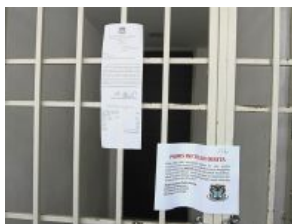
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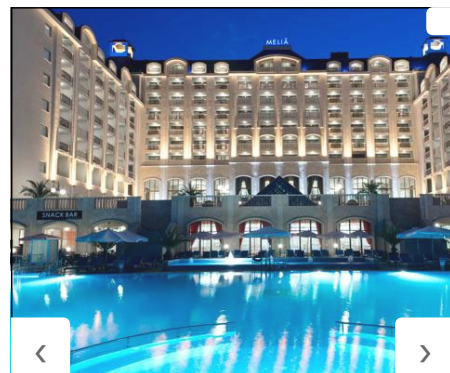
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