



## GENERAL NEWS

# Malaysian GPs call for enhanced regulations on PEU's inspection of clinics and medications

2 days ago, Reshmin Kaur Cheema



*Doctors have taken to the media to express their concerns towards the alleged raids by pharmaceutical enforcement unit at their clinic*

The Health Ministry's pharmaceutical services division has received much backlash of late from general practitioners around Malaysia. Yet, the department maintains that its enforcement on clinicians is nothing out of the ordinary.

Despite GPs accusing the department on increasing its enforcement, division senior director Dr Salmah Bahri denies this.

"We are meeting with associations representing general practitioners to clarify matters very soon," she asserted.

## Stop wasting doctor's time during peak hours, says clinician

Last week, a private GP – who runs a clinic in Kuala Lumpur – took to social media to express his frustration. He claimed that pharmacy division officers raided his office merely to find fault with his practice. He also posted pictures and video clips of the incident on his social media page.

In addition to that, a senior doctor related that other GPs were curious as to why the focus of this seems to be only on 'doctors' – leaving pharmacists out of the picture. "A lot of pharmacists are also guilty of changing medicines prescribed by doctors," he alleged.

Using the pen name "The Patriots", a senior doctor wrote in to a newspaper depicting the long-standing nature of the forceful attitude portrayed by pharmacy enforcement units (PEU). He quoted an incident whereby, supposedly, a doctor's reputation had been tarnished when he was asked to plead guilty to a "minor issue". In this situation, the PEU discovered one drug which was unrecorded upon an inspection of his practice.

Following this, the doctor was unrepresented when charged – as he was assured that the matter was dismissible – pleaded guilty and was slapped with a fine of RM5,000. He added that the officer who persuaded him "to enter the plea" went on to provide the press with details of the incident.

Thus, "The Patriots" insisted that the PEU should make an appointment prior to inspecting GPs clinics – if it is not a raid. He urged authorities to "stop wasting doctors' time during peak patient hours" – and called for the abolishment of the unit's right to have GPs arrested.

## MMA condemns action taken against clinicians dispensing OTC medicines

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has stepped in to oppose the PEU's action against doctors who dispense simple over-the-counter (OTC) medication at their practices. MMA president Dr Ravindran R. Naidu expressed that would cause an inconvenience to patients.

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

Many patients buy medications from pharmacies without being reviewed by clinicians or having obtained a prescription, said Dr Ravindran. He explained, "It's far more dangerous when pharmacists dispense controlled drugs without a prescription." Thus, he's calling for discussions with Health Ministry to ensure regulations are clear.

He expressed this following a letter – which was sent to the ministry's top officials – describing the "victimisation" by the PEU.

A source added, "PEU officers are even calling up our patients and asking all sorts of questions. The patients are anxious and it creates a mistrust between them and their doctor." He continued saying, prior to this, there was never an issue with patients obtaining their medications from clinic without an examination. "Now, it's a problem," he expressed.

Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia (MPCAM) president Dr Peter Chan also commented on cases where police reports by the PEU officials were made against clinicians who refused to disclose patients' particulars. The officials said it was "preventing a government officer from carrying out his duties."

Patients' clinic cards should not be confiscated nor should the PEU officials contact them, remarked Dr Chan. According to the Private Health Care Facilities and Services Act, patients' information can only leave the clinic by way of a court order. He explained that the Medical Act and Personal Data Protection Act also protects their information.

He also calls for the meaning of "patient" to be clarified – in relation to doctors and pharmacists dispensing drugs. The Poisons Act has enabled patients to purchase medications from clinics. "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," he elaborated. **MIMS**

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