

Use existing clinics, say GPs

NATION

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Medical Association has called on the Health Ministry to use the expertise of existing general practitioners (GPs) and infrastructure in the private practice, instead of building new clinics.

Its president Dr Ravindran R. Naidu made the call while lauding the ministry's opening of a five-storey shophouse health clinic in Kota Damansara and the possibility of more such clinics in commercial buildings as a positive move for easy access to the public.

"There are more than 6,500 registered GP clinics which are well distributed nationwide and it will be prudent for the Government to utilise the existing infrastructure and the well-trained doctors.

"This will save the Government capital and operative expenditure," he told *The Star* yesterday.

On Sunday, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam said the Government might be building more clinics at commercial premises such as shophouses or shopping malls to provide convenient healthcare services to the people.

He said such locations would provide easy access to people seeking treatment, especially those living far from clinics.

In June, *The Star* reported that as many as 500 clinics run by GPs were said to have closed between 2014 and 2016 due to poor business and the MMA was worried that the situation might worsen.

Dr Ravindran said the ministry should optimise the use of the private GPs as more than 70% of these facilities were seeing fewer than 30 patients a day.

"The Government should engage with the GPs to buy their services and work in partnership rather than compete with them," he said.

An example of this partnership was between the Selangor government via Peduli Sihat and GPs in the state for those who fall under the bottom 40% (B40) income group, he said.

He said the proposal had been forwarded to the ministry over the years.

Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia deputy president Dr Raj Kumar Maharajah said he was surprised to hear about the possibility of the Government setting up more clinics as there had been talk that it might use the services of private GPs.

“The Government has been talking about public-private partnership but it seems they are competing with us,” he said.

He said GP consultations in Malaysia were affordable and the healthcare provided was according to the World Health Organisation standards.

“The Government and GPs could negotiate a price which is acceptable to both,” he said, adding that the poor would get continued healthcare from the same doctor which was not possible, due to the high turnover rate, in government-run clinics.

Dr Soo Tai Kang, who runs a clinic in Kuchai Lama, said the Health Ministry should do more to engage with private GPs instead of setting up new clinics and hiring more doctors.

“There are so many GPs around,” he said.

He said patients would prefer a doctor to examine them while the 1Malaysia Clinics usually have a medical assistant and not a doctor.

“Some of the patients from the 1Malaysia Clinic near me came to see me as they were more confident with my treatment.

“As doctors, we have the expertise to diagnose and treat,” he added.

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