

MMA calls for sexual harassment act to protect junior doctors

By FMT Reporters - August 4, 2018 9:47 AM



PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) today urged the government to enact laws to deter the sexual harassment of junior doctors amid the ongoing discussion on housemen being bullied by their seniors.

In a statement, MMA president Dr Mohamed Namazie Ibrahim said Malaysia had no laws dealing specifically with sexual harassment in the workplace.

Although the human resources ministry had come up with a code of practice on the prevention and eradication of sexual harassment in the workplace, he added, the common opinion was that it had little impact.

“The code of practice will stay as a code of practice if there are no strict regulations enforced to punish the perpetrators or to deter the perpetuation of this behaviour,” he said.

“MMA urges the government to enact the Sexual Harassment Act as quickly as possible to deter this behaviour.”

Namazie’s remarks follow the health ministry’s pledge to organise closed-door dialogue sessions with junior doctors and housemen to discuss issues pertaining to their placements.

Health Minister Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said the ministry understood that despite the various channels available for junior doctors to lodge complaints, many were afraid to come forward for fear of being victimised later.

A recent report by the Sunday Star meanwhile alleged that a department head of orthopaedics in a hospital in the Klang Valley had sexually harassed and made sexual advances against house officers.

An independent inquiry body has been set up by the health ministry and the women, family and community development ministry to probe the allegations.

Namazie said it was a shame that such incidents could take place, especially within the medical fraternity.

"MMA is of the view that there may be other cases that are not reported due to the fear of victim blaming and discrimination among colleagues.

"Some also probably fear that they will lose their jobs if they report such incidents, especially when the perpetrator is their superior."

He called on the government to look into the matter and take all necessary action to rectify the situation.

"The recent incidents indicate that the incidence of this behaviour is more serious than what was believed to be in the past," he added.

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