

More transparency needed in foreign workers' screening

Dr Mohamed Namazie Ibrahim, Malaysian Medical Association | Published: 20 Aug 2018, 11:26 am | Modified: 20 Aug 2018, 7:08 pm



LETTER | In 1997, the previous government awarded a concession to Fomema to monitor the health of foreign workers coming to work in Malaysia.

The concessionaire agreement was renewed and signed in December 2016 and has been placed under the Official Secrets Act despite strong objections from the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA).

Three parties were signatories to the agreement namely Fomema, Ministry of Health (MOH) and Unit Kerjasama Awam Swasta (UKAS) which was under the Prime Minister's Department. The ownership of Fomema has changed several times over the last 21 years

The concessionaire agreement involves medical screening by selected panel clinic providers, laboratories for blood and urine screening for communicable diseases and chest X-rays at X-ray facilities appointed by Fomema.

Furthermore, a sole company providing X-ray transmission and software was appointed by Fomema to provide the service. Unfortunately, there has been a lack of transparency in laboratory and chest X-ray facility allocations.

The work processes and the upgrade requirements by the Ministry of Health have also increased the cost.

The medical screenings conducted by the general practitioners of the panel clinics involve: consultation (despite the language barrier, without an interpreter most of the time), physical examinations, taking blood samples and urine collection, review of results, data entry into the Fomema website, certification of worker suitability, dealing with employers, notification of communicable diseases, dealing with the personnel of the inspection team from Fomema, attending to the appeals process of unsuitable foreign workers and chest X-ray reviews.

MMA welcomes the health ministry's move to improve the quality and standards of health screening services offered to foreign workers but it comes with a cost to the providers. The directive for the implementation of digital X-ray must come from the Ministry of Health with an appropriate revision of fees to cover the additional cost of purchasing digital X-ray equipment and other administrative costs.

In addition, the Fomema panel clinics have incurred more expenses to meet the new requirements imposed by a third-party company appointed by Fomema in terms of the purchase of software from the company costing RM5,000 and RM3 per transmission, which has burdened the general practitioners who have been providing these services since the implementation of the new work processes.

MMA urges Fomema to open up the X-ray transmission to other vendors to provide this service as competition may reduce the cost.

MOH as the principal signatory of the concessionaire agreement has to step in to address the lack of transparency and solve problems faced by the general practitioners.

MMA hopes the current government will address this long-standing issue of 20 years as it has committed to good governance, transparency and accountability.

The writer is the president of the Malaysian Medical Association.

The views expressed here are those of the author/contributor and do not necessarily represent the views of *Malaysiakini*.

