

President's Message



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The New Year started with MMA being called to attend several meetings in the Ministry of Health as well as in other government and non-governmental agencies. As the President, I was also invited to speak in several meetings and symposia.

Healthcare Programmes of Selangor

The Selangor government had started a breast cancer screening programme since 2009, offering free mammograms to all women above the age of 40 who are Selangor state residents. The Selangor Executive Committee member and the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare, Women and Family Empowerment, Dr Siti Mariah Mahmud, invited me to a meeting to discuss the screening programme and for MMA to give our comments on how to improve the current scheme. After a lengthy discussion, in which the PPS Chairman and Chairman and Hon. Secretary of MMA Selangor were also present, she requested MMA to give a new proposal to enhance the screening programme after consultation with our experts. The revised proposal conforming to the Clinical Practice Guidelines as approved by the Ministry of Health has been presented to her.

The *Peduli Sihat* scheme that was introduced in 2017 with a budget of RM125 million will also be continued in 2019 with an increase in the amount to be reimbursed from RM50 to RM70 to general practitioners. The Selangor State Government has allocated a further RM21 million in the 2019 budget to achieve the Selangor State Health Sihat. This allocation covers RM10 million for the Healthy Care Scheme, RM3 million for the Dengue Prevention Programme, and RM5 million for the Health Assistance Programme, which includes dialysis and other forms of assistance. The mental health programme has also been emphasized by expanding the existing Selangor Counseling Centre through the activation of online counseling sessions.

Meeting with the Chairman and CEO of SOCSO

In a chance meeting with the newly appointed Chairman of the SOCSO, Encik Zakri Khir at the Human Rights Day celebration on 9 December 2018, he had indicated his vision for the SOCSO under his watch. We agreed that the MMA Exco members will meet with him and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of SOCSO to discuss his plans to revamp SOCSO and the role MMA and its members

can play in achieving this. The new vision would be to place more emphasis on "return to work" rather than the current heavy expenditure on compensation for invalidity, and pensions for survivors alone. Improved rehabilitation programmes and vocational retraining for new employment would be the focus for the return to work initiative.

In 2013, the then Minister of Human Resources Datuk Seri Dr. S Subramaniam had allocated a significant sum to enable those who were unemployed and insured by SOCSO but not eligible to receive cash benefits under the Invalidity Pension Scheme or Employment Injury Insurance Scheme, to return to work. Those undergoing physical and vocational rehabilitation were paid a nominal sum per day as an interim measure until they were able to return to work in a fast and safe manner. This scheme needs to be further strengthened with the amendments to the law.

There is a need to increase the number of certified disablement and invalidity assessors and this would need the participation of private registered medical practitioners who are now not able to act as assessors even if they are certified and cannot be appointed to the medical boards. The medical practitioners in the medical board are all from the public sector now. To enable the private medical practitioners to be appointed as assessors and to the medical board, current Employees Social Security Act 1969 will need to be amended. The proposed amended will also address the issue of return to work.

The scope of SOCSO insurance cover has also been extended to nearly 2 million foreign workers.

Health Screening Programme (HSP) of SOCSO for employees that was launched in 2013 provided vouchers for free health screening for all above the age of 40, including pap smears and mammograms for women. The vouchers were not fully utilised or were not given to the employees by their employers and there are still many vouchers available. SOCSO has also now enabled an online voucher-less method, whereby employees can receive the voucher numbers by SMS after registering online. We have requested another meeting with the officer in charge of HSP to discuss further methods to improve the utilisation of this benefit by the employees.

Health Protection Scheme by MOH

In the 2019 budget, the Minister of Finance announced

an allocation of RM100 million to the Ministry of Health (MOH) for the Health Protection Scheme or Perlindungan Kesihatan (PEKA B40) for those above the age of 50 years in the B40 group. It has been estimated that there are 3.94 million people in this cohort of the B40 group, and initially 800,000 will be recruited to participate in the screening programme for non-communicable diseases and cancer. MMA has been requested to encourage its members to participate in this programme that targets the low-income group who may not be able to access other screening projects. Combined with the HSP by SOCSO, PEKA has the potential of increasing the total number of people who can benefit from this programme, especially those who are not employed or who have retired.

The details of the PEKA programme was given to us but cannot be revealed at the time of writing as we had to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement till the Minister of Health officially launches the programme. Perhaps by the time the members read this, it would have been announced.

PEKA B40 is a project originally proposed to YB Datuk Seri Dr Zulkifly Ahmad, Minister of Health, in June 2018 by MMA, based on the outcome of the Harvard Study Group which emphasised early detection of non-communicable diseases. This move by the Ministry of Health to engage the private practitioners is unprecedented and is the fruit of the numerous requests by MMA to MOH for public-private partnership in healthcare delivery. Together with four other organisations, MMA has had two meetings to discuss the remuneration package for the general practitioners who would be involved in the PEKA programme. We hope to have a good outcome from these negotiations, which took into account the targetted underprivileged group which needs good healthcare with early detection of diseases. This programme should be considered a social responsibility of the general practitioners and the specialists may be called upon to do their part as well in other programmes.

While this is a nationwide project there are also other States like Selangor that are rolling out similar projects. The question that arises is whether the healthcare policy is being fragmented and whether these programmes will serve the rakyat in a meaningful manner. National healthcare policy is urgently needed to prevent wastage of limited resources and also to avoid duplication of services that are being provided.

Post Graduate Diploma in Diabetes

MMA and iheed from Ireland have partnered to promote the Post Graduate Diploma in Diabetes course in Primary Care specifically designed for physicians in ASEAN and Middle East countries. The Diploma is issued by the University of Warwick which is a leading university in the United Kingdom. The course combines practical and case-based learning that will be delivered local and global diabetologists. Two briefing sessions were held to promote the course; one in the MMA House Kuala Lumpur on 13 January 2019, and the second on the

following day in Penang. Both these sessions attracted a good number of participants. The course is expected to start in March 2019.

As it has often been said and recognised, primary care will be the driving force to achieve universal health coverage. Enhancing primary care through courses like will be beneficial and it is expected that many general practitioners will avail the many opportunities that are being arranged to upscale their knowledge and skills.

SCHOMOS Meeting with Minister of Health

YB Minister of Health kindly allotted some time to meet the SCHOMOS Executive Committee members. Several issues pertaining to the public sector doctors including the University medical staff were discussed. This was the first meeting with YB Minister of Health and he was quite impressed with the presentations that were made and had agreed to look into the issues that were raised.

I would like to wish all our Chinese members Happy Chinese New Year, Kong Hee Fatt Chai. May the New Year bring peace and prosperity for all.

