

MMA concerned over patient outcomes amid human insulin shortage crisis

- By Bernie Yeo
- 23/08/2024



THE Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has expressed deep concern over the unprecedented shortage of human insulin in the country which has led to the recent decision by the Health Ministry (MOH) to adjust the treatment regimens for diabetes patients.

While acknowledging MOH's efforts to address this crisis through emergency measures, MMA president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz said there is still grave concern about the potential impact on patient outcomes, especially for those who rely on human insulin for their diabetes management.

"The decision to switch patients from human insulin to more expensive alternatives, such as SGLT2 inhibitors and insulin analogues raises several significant concerns," she said in a statement on Friday (Aug 23).

“While these alternatives may be effective for some, the sudden transition, driven by necessity rather than clinical preference, may pose risks, especially if patients are not adequately monitored or if they do not respond well to the new treatments.”

Citing patient safety and treatment efficacy, Dr Azizan said the shift to alternative treatments, while unavoidable given the circumstances, must be carried out with extreme caution.

As patients with complex health conditions, including those with Type 1 diabetes, pregnant women, and those with serious kidney failure, are particularly vulnerable, any changes to their treatment regimen must be closely monitored to ensure that their health does not deteriorate, she added.

Dr Azizan further noted that the criteria for switching from human insulin to alternative treatments must be carefully adhered to, and stressed that these should not replace the individualised care that each patient deserves.

“The risk of worsening glycaemic control and the potential for increased complications must be mitigated through rigorous follow-up and patient education,” she stated.

She said the crisis underscores the need for a more robust and diversified supply chain for essential medications such as insulin.

“The MMA urges the MOH to expedite the identification of alternative manufacturers and to work towards ensuring that such shortages do not recur in the future,” she said.

“The MMA calls for transparency and open communication with the public and healthcare providers as this situation develops.

“We strongly recommend that the MOH establishes a nationwide committee to oversee the management of stock and supply of essential medicines.”

The insulin shortage crisis, due to reported supply issues with local manufacturer Biocon Malaysia that’s owned by India’s Biocon Biologics Limited, was first reported by CodeBlue on Wednesday (Aug 21).

The health news portal said the supply of human insulin is especially dire in Selangor, with reports of shortages in Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Melaka and Kedah as well.

In a statement on X on Aug 22, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said of the 41 drugs used to treat diabetes, only human insulin is facing supply issues, adding that medical supplies in the ministry are continuously managed “to withstand supply disruption”.

Dr Dzulkefly further said the supply disruption for human insulin was due to production issues on a local supplier’s side, and that efforts are underway to diversify supplies of insulin to ensure there are enough supplies in the future. – Aug 23, 2024