

## 'Put off display of meds price'

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**PETALING JAYA:** The mandatory display of medicine prices at private clinics should be postponed until issues surrounding consultation fees and prescription drug regulations are addressed, says the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA).

Its president Datuk Dr Kalwinder Singh Khaira warned that enforcing this policy prematurely could threaten the sustainability of private primary care services and exacerbate the strain on public healthcare facilities.

"While MMA supports transparency in healthcare pricing, implementing this policy without addressing the long-standing issue of general practitioner (GP) consultation fees, unchanged for over 30 years, will endanger GP clinics and push more patients toward already overcrowded public healthcare facilities," he said in a statement yesterday.

Private GP clinics, he said, have traditionally served as the first point of care for many Malaysians, especially within the B40 and M40 income groups.

However, the sector faces increasing challenges due to an oversupply of GP clinics, driven by contract doctors leaving government service, leading to intense competition and financial strain, said Dr Kalwinder.

He added that a previous MMA study revealed that 60% of clinics operate under financial pressure, with many barely breaking even or running at a loss.

Dr Kalwinder stressed that GPs do not operate like retail businesses but provide comprehensive, regulated care.

"Medicine dispensing is not a separate service but an integral part of the regulated, patient-centred medical process.

"With rising operational costs and stagnant consultation fees, many clinics rely on medicine dispensing revenue to remain affordable," he said.

Dr Kalwinder also raised concerns that mandating price displays could lead to increased prescription drug sales at pharmacies or e-commerce platforms without proper oversight.

“There is a strong likelihood of consumers opting to purchase prescription drugs from pharmacies or via online shopping.

“The sale of prescription drugs with a doctor’s prescription must be strictly enforced,” Dr Kalwinder said, urging the government to address GP consultation fees and enforce prescription drug regulations before implementing the policy.

In a statement, Federation of Private Medical Practitioners Associations Malaysia president Dr Shanmuganathan TV Ganeson claimed that the persistent push by some groups to mandate price display in GP clinics was “a deeper financial agenda” to benefit a certain industry.

“The narrative of transparency conveniently ignores the fundamental issue, which is the lack of a viable financial structure for GPs to sustain their practices,” he said.

Dr Shanmuganathan also highlighted the practice of issuing prescriptions upon patient request, allowing them the freedom to purchase medicines elsewhere, as a longstanding tradition reinforcing patient choice.

“Unlike retail pharmacies, where there is a separate business structure, GP clinics provide integrated care, making mandatory price displays redundant and misleading,” he said.

Calling for a holistic approach to healthcare financing reform, he also cautioned against letting commercial interests from one sector dictate policy changes.