

MMA calls on Parliament to urgently debate doctors' on-call allowances

By ARFA YUNUS

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PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has urged Members of Parliament to debate the long-overdue revision of doctors' on-call allowances, calling it crucial for patient safety and the healthcare system's long-term sustainability.

MMA president Datuk Dr Thirunavukarasu Rajoo said the issue must be treated with urgency, not only for the benefit of doctors but for the resilience of Malaysia's healthcare services.

"For doctors, the on-call allowance is not a privilege. It is recognition of work that often stretches beyond 24 hours without proper rest, handling life-and-death decisions continuously," he said in a statement on Sunday (Sept 28).

He said that when broken down, the existing allowance amounts to only RM9.16 an hour - a rate that has not been revised in over a decade, despite the growing demands and responsibilities placed on doctors.

"When doctors are fatigued and demoralised, the consequences are not abstract: patients' safety and quality of care are directly affected.

"Taking care of those who care for the nation's health must be a priority," he said.

Dr Thirunavukarasu added that MPs have a fiduciary duty to ensure healthcare issues receive serious attention in parliamentary debates.

He stressed that fair pay, balanced workloads and clear career development pathways are essential to retaining medical professionals and sustaining the nation's health system.

The MMA also expressed concern over recent remarks by Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Johari Abdul, following proposals from independent think tanks suggesting reallocating MPs' allowances to support increases in doctors' on-call (Etap) payments.

“This should not be framed as ‘doctors versus MPs’.

“We recognise that there are many hardworking and principled MPs who have consistently stood up for healthcare and the welfare of the rakyat, and we value their continued support,” he said.

Dr Thirunavukarasu said the association remains open to constructive dialogue with the Speaker and MPs to achieve reforms that safeguard the well-being of Malaysians and ensure the sustainability of healthcare services.

During an interview with the BFM Radio on Friday (Sept 26), Johari dismissed a suggestion for a 50% cut to MPs’ allowances to fund an increase in doctors’ on-call allowances.

Johari said while doctors can keep their entire wages for themselves, an MP is expected to fork out funds from their RM25,000 monthly allowance to run their office, donate to constituents for various occasions, and contribute during emergencies.