



Clarity needed on use of ‘Dr’ title, says private doctors’ group

Dineskumar Ragu

FPMPAM says guidelines should specify how the title can or cannot be used by unregistered medical practitioners, especially in commercial health activities and advertising.



FPMPAM president Dr Shanmuganathan Ganeson said it is important to realise that the public does not interpret the title of ‘Dr’ in purely academic terms.

PETALING JAYA: A private doctors’ group has called for clearer guidelines and enforcement regarding the use of the “Dr” title for unregistered medical practitioners active in commercial health activities.

The Federation of Private Medical Practitioners’ Associations Malaysia (FPMPAM) said while the Medical Act 1971 already safeguards against misrepresentation of the title by unregistered individuals, clarity is needed in matters related to advertising or social media.

“This is less about restriction and more about ensuring transparency and protecting the public from confusion,” FPMPAM president Dr Shanmuganathan Ganeson told FMT.

On Dec 23, the Malaysian Medical Council (MMC) said medical graduates were permitted to use the title to reflect their academic qualifications even if they were not registered as medical practitioners with the council.

MMC was responding to questions over youth and sports minister Dr Taufiq Johari’s title, after checks

found that he was not registered in the council's database.

Shanmuganathan said while MMC's statement was accurate, it was equally important to recognise that the public does not interpret the title of "Dr" in purely academic terms.

He said that in healthcare, the title carries strong, legitimate associations with clinical competence, professional accountability and patient safety.

"When used in connection with health-related activities, it inevitably conveys an impression of medical authority.

"Therefore, while MMC's clarification may be technically correct, it must be understood alongside the broader responsibility of protecting the public from misunderstanding or misrepresentation."

Risk of title misuse

Dr Thirunavukarasu Rajoo, president of the Malaysian Medical Association, said while the title might be used by those who have completed medical degrees, it was important to emphasise that this did

not confer on them the right to practise medicine or imply that they are registered with MMC.

In a statement, he said Section 33 of the Medical Act makes it an offence for anyone not registered or exempted under the Act to use names, titles or descriptions that could mislead the public into believing that they are qualified or authorised to practise medicine or perform surgery.

Thirunavukarasu also said that when an unregistered doctor uses the title in a medical or health-related setting, whether in person or virtually, there is a real risk of the public being misled into believing that the doctor is legally registered.

Shanmuganathan also expressed concern that the risk of public misunderstanding could be amplified in today's environment, where health advice is widely shared through social media, wellness platforms and commercial endorsements.

"Allowing its (title) use without clear boundaries risks eroding that trust. Ultimately, this is not about limiting academic recognition, but about safeguarding the public and preserving the integrity of the medical profession," he said.