

‘Insulting’: MMA slams govt’s decision to reject call to raise doctors’ weekend on-call allowance



The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) slammed the government over its apparent incomprehension in dealing with doctors’ welfare. — AFP pic

By John Bunyan

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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 4 — The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) slammed the government over its apparent incomprehension in dealing with doctors’ welfare.

MMA president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz said the government was being “inefficient” when it came to replying to the issue of doctors’ welfare as it took Putrajaya 10 months to share the feedback from the townhall session that was held in February.

“We are utterly disappointed over the government’s outright rejection of our proposal requesting to increase public healthcare doctors’ weekend on-call allowance from the current hourly rate of RM9.16 to RM25.

“The Ministry of Health’s (MoH) response stating that RM9.16 is an ‘appropriate’ rate is an insult to not only doctors, but all healthcare workers in the country. Is the government even aware that

there are waiters in the country who get paid a higher hourly rate than its doctors?" Dr Azizan asked via a statement.

Contrary to the government's explanation, Dr Azizan said that the amount is for 24 hours of work (which would not be paid had the doctor not worked); therefore, the RM220 should be divided by 24 hours.

"The criteria for selection to permanent criteria is extremely general and does not provide any sort of ranking system for a transparent, proper assessment and evaluation of doctors," she added.

Dr Azizan also said that the inaccurate information provided by the government on these issues had created false public perception.

"It should be noted that not all public healthcare doctors are entitled to the allowances mentioned.

"Entitlement to the various allowances depends on the doctor's position and rank. Most doctors do not receive such allowances stated in the government's reply," she said.

Yesterday, *Free Malaysia Today* reported that the government turned down a request from the MMA for an increase in on-call allowances for doctors, stating that it is bound by a 2019 service circular by the Finance Ministry and Public Service Department (JPA).

In a written reply to the MMA two weeks ago, the Health Ministry said the position of other services in relation to allowances and the financial position of the country must also be considered.

According to the ministry, it had submitted many applications and appeals to JPA in 2020 and last year, but they were all rejected.

"At the moment, the government is of the view that the current on-call allowances are appropriate as doctors enjoy many other allowances. They are critical service allowance (RM750 monthly), specialist incentive (from RM2,200 to RM3,100 monthly), and locum allowance to work off-duty hours (RM80 per hour).

"Others are elective surgery allowance (RM200 for specialists and RM80 for medical officers per hour) and for hospital administration (RM1,520 to RM2,480 per month according to grades)," MoH was quoted as saying.

Dr Azizan said those at the Health Ministry, who were supposed to make decisions, may lack a clear understanding or are missing the accurate information needed to decide on the proposed increase.

"If indeed the decision (to reject the increase in on-call allowance) was made without referring to accurate information, we wish to request that the government re-evaluate and reconsider its decision concerning the proposed on-call rate increase.

"Remember Dr Ali with his RM17k salary? We would like to remind the government that this is not the first time the government had provided inaccurate information in a statement.

"Early this year, the government's explainer on on-call allowance published in the media was factually incorrect. The government had since not retracted its statement nor apologised for its mistake," she explained.



File picture of Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz. Dr Azizan said those at the Health Ministry, who were supposed to make decisions, may lack a clear understanding or are missing the accurate information needed to decide on the proposed increase.

Dr Azizan also reminded the government of the high attrition rate in public healthcare.

“From 2017 to 2022, Contract Medical Officer resignations jumped by a whopping 1,131 per cent.

“It was also reported that 890 specialists resigned from government service between 2018 to 2022 — an average of more than four specialists leaving per week between that time,” she added.

She also said that the government should not take lightly on the frustration among doctors in public healthcare

“There is concern that on top of the burnout many doctors are experiencing coupled with the low wages earned, issues like the stagnant on-call allowance may spark further frustration and brain drain.

“Doctors in public healthcare have not seen an increase in on-call allowance for over a decade. Taking into consideration inflation, the on-call allowance rate should be reviewed every five years,” she said.