

‘Inaccurate, Insensitive, Inefficient’: MMA Slams Government’s Refusal To Raise Doctors’ On-Call Allowance

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MMA slams the government’s refusal to raise doctors’ on-call allowance, saying it’s an “insult” for MOH to describe the RM9/hour rate as appropriate. Doctors have widely criticised the health minister online for maintaining the status quo on doctor issues.



Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz. Photo courtesy of MMA.

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 12 – The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has lambasted Putrajaya’s rejection of its proposal to increase government doctors’ weekend on-call allowance from RM9 to RM25 per hour.

The doctors' association described the Ministry of Health's (MOH) written response to MMA – issued just last month, 10 months after a town hall organised by the association between doctors and Health Minister Dr Zaliha Mustafa last February – as “inaccurate, insensitive, and inefficient”.

“The MOH’s response stating that RM9.16 is an ‘appropriate’ rate is an insult to not only doctors, but all health care workers in the country,” MMA president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz said in a statement last Saturday.

“Is the government even aware that there are waiters in the country who get paid a higher hourly rate than its doctors? Contrary to the government’s explanation – the amount is paid for 24 hours of work (which would not be paid had the doctor not worked), therefore the RM220 should be divided by 24 hours,” she added. RM220 is the rate of medical officers’ on-call allowance, or ETAP, for active on-call duty on weekends and public holidays.

In the MOH’s response, the ministry listed five other allowances that medical officers are entitled to, but MMA pointed out that such entitlements depend on the doctor’s position and rank.

“Most doctors do not receive such allowances stated in the government’s reply.”

The MOH had listed five allowances: the Critical Service Incentive Payment, Specialist Incentive Payment, locum allowance, Elective Surgery Allowance, and Hospital Administration Allowance.

“At this time, the government’s priority in allowance hikes is for service schemes that are still receiving low allowance rates at less than RM100 a month,” the MOH said.

Nearly a year into Dr Zaliha’s office as health minister under Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim’s administration, the MOH’s October response to MMA maintained the status quo on chronic doctor issues, rejecting proposals for not just a raise in the on-call allowance, but also demands related to promotions and more transparent selection criteria for permanent and JUSA positions.

“From the MOH’s written response to MMA, it appears that the people at the position to make decisions may lack a clear understanding or are missing accurate information needed to decide on the proposed increase,” Dr Azizan said.

“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 reevaluate and reconsider its decision concerning the proposed on-call rate increase.”

In response to the MOH maintaining its stance on the selection process for permanent posts for doctors, as opposed to using a rank or point system as proposed by MMA, the doctors' association reiterated that the selection criteria was "extremely general".

MMA reminded the government that the resignation rate among contract medical officers spiked 1,131 per cent from 110 resignations in 2017 to 1,354 resignations in 2022.

"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," Dr Azizan said.

"The frustration among doctors in public healthcare is a matter not to be taken lightly. 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 health care 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."

Prior to MMA's statement, Dr Zaliha's special advisor, Bandar Kuching MP Dr Kelvin Yii, claimed on X that *CodeBlue's* article last Friday on the government's decision to maintain the status quo on government doctor issues did not paint the "full picture".

"This was a response to MMA to inform 'current status at time being' of issues raised during the last town hall, NOT to say nothing is done to address many of these systemic issues which many are not within decisions of KKM. Efforts ongoing!"

The health minister herself, however, has not issued a press release or called for a press conference to elaborate on these so-called "ongoing efforts", despite facing heavy criticism from doctors in the public sector, as well as Hartal Doktor Kontrak (HDK), after *CodeBlue's* report.

HDK and other government doctors have also described Dr Zaliha as "delusional", in response to the health minister's claim in Parliament last Thursday that contract doctors were "happy" to receive permanent positions.