

Better Pay, Work Hours Key To Retaining Nurses, Not Lower Entry Barriers — Malaysian Medical Association

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MMA urges the govt to improve nurses' pay, work hours, and career growth instead of lowering entry requirements to tackle shortages. Better terms will attract and retain talent while upholding Malaysia's high health care standards.



Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Kalwinder Singh Khaira speaks at the Industry Leadership Summit 2024 in Kuala Lumpur on October 10, 2024, organised by the Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy and supported by PMCare Sdn Bhd. Photo by Saw

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) takes note of the government's decision to lower the entry requirements for diploma in nursing programmes as part of efforts to address the shortage of nurses in the country.

While we recognise the urgency of the issue, we hope that this has been thoroughly evaluated by the regulators and all possible options reviewed before deciding on this measure, which will be in place for intakes for the next two years.

Malaysia's health care system is internationally recognised for its high standards, and it is crucial that these standards are upheld. Nurses are vital members of the health care team, working alongside doctors and being relied upon to playing a crucial role in patient care.

Rather than easing entry requirements, we strongly believe that efforts should be focused on improving nurses' terms of services and employment.

This includes better remuneration, better work hours, and career development opportunities to not only attract new student nurses but also to retain talent in the profession.

Long-serving nurses could perhaps be recognised with attractive and meaningful incentives.

The government should also explore ways to increase the intake of students at public nursing schools to sustainably address the shortage while maintaining the quality of nursing education.

We should be addressing the root causes of the shortages of nurses in the country. Similar to intakes at local medical schools, less nurses are being produced due to a drop or inadequate enrolment at nursing schools.

This shortage will eventually have an effect both on the public and private healthcare sectors.

Students are also choosing new, emerging professions, amongst which are those in the digital technology sector and this affects intake for health care courses.

As such, when competing for talent, especially for courses in the health care sector, service conditions, remunerations, and career progression in the field are key determining factors which should be looked into and improved.

Whatever remedial actions being taken or being planned to overcome the shortages should simultaneously always strive to maintain the standards of the profession.

Dr Kalwinder Singh Khaira is president of the Malaysian Medical Association.

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