

MMA urges govt to improve nurses' working conditions, not ease entry requirements

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has called on the government to focus on improving nurses' working conditions and remuneration, rather than lowering entry requirements for diploma in nursing programmes, to address the country's nurse shortage.

Its president Datuk Dr Kalwinder Singh Khaira acknowledged the urgency of tackling the issue, but emphasised the importance of maintaining Malaysia's internationally recognised healthcare standards.

He called on regulators to thoroughly evaluate the decision, which will be in place for the next two years, and ensure that all possible alternatives have been considered.

"Nurses are vital members of the healthcare team, working alongside doctors and being relied upon to play 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, reasonable work hours, and career development opportunities to not only attract new student nurses, but also to retain talent in the profession," he said in a statement, here, today.

The association also proposed offering meaningful incentives to long-serving nurses, to retain experienced professionals in the field.

MMA further recommended increasing student intake at public nursing schools to sustainably address the shortage, while maintaining the quality of nursing standards.

"We should be addressing the root causes of the shortages of nurses in the country. Similar to intake for local medical schools, fewer 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," he added.

Dr Kalwinder also pointed out that students are increasingly opting for careers in emerging digital technology fields, leading to a decline in enrollment for healthcare courses, and stressed that, to compete for talent, the government must improve service conditions, remuneration and career progression within the nursing profession.

"Whatever remedial actions are being taken, or being planned to overcome the shortages, should simultaneously always strive to maintain the standards of the profession at all times," he said.

Recently Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad announced plans to relax entry requirements for nursing programmes, to counter the nationwide nurse shortage. The new criteria will be applicable only to students enrolling in the 2025 and 2026 intakes.

Under the previous requirements, candidates needed five Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia credits, including for Bahasa Melayu, Mathematics, and one science subject, along with a pass in English. However, under the new requirements, applicants will now only need credits for Bahasa Melayu, Mathematics, and one science subject, along with a pass in two additional subjects, including English.