

Malaysian Medical Association: Improve nurses' work conditions, not make entry easy

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Dr Kalwinder Singh says while the association recognised the urgency of the issue, it hoped that this matter would be thoroughly evaluated by the regulators and all possible options reviewed before the finalisation of the decision, set to be in place in the next two years. – Bernama photo

KUCHING (Feb 7): The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has urged the government to focus on improving nurses' terms of services and employment, rather than easing the entry requirements for the relevant diploma programmes as means to address the shortage of nurses in the country.

MMA president Datuk Dr Kalwinder Singh Khaira said while the association recognised the urgency of the issue, it hoped that this matter would be thoroughly evaluated by the regulators and all possible options reviewed before the finalisation of the decision, set to be in place in the next two years.

“Malaysia’s healthcare system is internationally recognised for its high standards, and it is crucial that these standards are upheld.

“Nurses are vital members of the healthcare team, working alongside doctors and being relied upon when it comes to playing a crucial role in patient care.

“Rather than easing entry requirements (for the programmes), we strongly believe that efforts should be focused on improving nurses’ terms of services and employment.

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

“Long-serving nurses could perhaps be recognised with attractive and meaningful incentives,” he said in a statement today.

His remarks were made in response to a recent government decision of lowering the admission requirements for the diploma in nursing programme for Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) holders from five credits to three, for the 2025 and 2026 intakes, as a way to tackle the shortage of nurses.

Health Minister Dzulkefly Ahmad had confirmed the move, saying that it was necessary to address the ongoing shortage of nurses, which could reach nearly 60 per cent by 2030 if left unaddressed.

Under the new requirements, applicants would only need credits for Bahasa Melayu, Mathematics, and one Science subject, and a pass in two subjects including English.

Previously, candidates were required to have five SPM credits, including for Bahasa Melayu, Mathematics, and one Science subject. They were also required to pass their English subject.

In this regard, Dr Kalwinder said 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. Similar to the intake for local medical schools, less nurses are being produced due to a drop or inadequate enrolment at nursing schools.

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

“The students are also choosing new, emerging professions, amongst which are those in the digital technology sector, and this affects intake for healthcare courses.

“As such, when competing for talents, especially for courses in the healthcare sector, the service conditions, remuneration and career progression in the field are key determining factors that should be looked into and improved.

“Whatever remedial actions being taken or being planned to overcome the shortage should simultaneously always strive to maintain the standards of the profession at all times,” he stressed.