

Medical association calls on govt to review MOs specialist training pathways policy



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KUCHING, Feb 7 — The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) is calling on the government to review its policy regarding Medical Officers' (MOs) access to specialist training pathways.

MMA is advocating for MOs the autonomy to choose whether they wish to apply for the Hadiah Latihan Persekutuan (HLP) scholarship when pursuing specialisation through the parallel pathway.

“Currently, all MOs working in public health, regardless of whether they want to specialise through the MMED (local masters) programme or the parallel pathway through Royal Colleges, are mandated to apply for the HLP scholarship,” said MMA president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz in a statement yesterday.

She argued that this mandatory requirement is restrictive and unnecessary, particularly for those opting for the parallel pathway.

According to Dr Azizan, the current system poses several challenges, including prolonged waiting periods of one to four years for HLP approval, leading to delays in specialisation training.

“This bottleneck in the approval process significantly hampers the production of much-needed specialists in the country’s healthcare system,” she added.

Moreover, she said the selection criteria and availability of HLP scholarships for the parallel pathway remain unclear, contributing to further uncertainty and frustration among MOs seeking specialisation.

“The recent introduction of HLP for the parallel pathway has exacerbated the situation by creating an intense competition among candidates due to the limited number of openings.

“The restrictive nature of the system has led to some MOs opting to pursue opportunities abroad.”

Dr Azizan said there is currently a critical shortage of specialists in Malaysia – less than 13,000 specialists are serving across the nation, and only around 9,000 of them work in public healthcare.

Given that over 70 per cent of the population relies on public healthcare services, she said this shortage is particularly concerning.

“The country’s population-to-specialist ratio stands at 10,000:4; far below the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average of 10,000:14.3.

“Despite the government’s target of achieving 28,000 specialists by 2030, the current rate of specialist production, estimated at around 1,000 annually, makes this goal unlikely to be met,” she added.

In light of these challenges, Dr Azizan emphasised the urgent need for government flexibility in specialist training pathways by giving MOs the option to opt out of HLP while pursuing specialisation.

She believed through the parallel pathway, the healthcare system could better address the pressing need for specialists and improve the country’s overall healthcare delivery.

– Borneo Post