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## **Malaysian GPs rally against lack of consultation on new drug-price display law, call for fee review**



Malaysian GPs protesting in the administrative capital of Putrajaya on May 6 over a government directive requiring the mandatory display of drug prices. ST PHOTO: LU WEI HOONG



**Lu Wei Hoong**

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**PUTRAJAYA** – Hundreds of Malaysian general practitioners (GPs) gathered in the administrative capital of Putrajaya on May 6 to protest against a new government directive requiring the mandatory display of drug prices that the medical sector says was done without consulting them.

The new rule requiring private healthcare facilities and community pharmacies to display price lists for medicines, which came into force on May 1, is parked under a set of anti-profiteering laws.

But stakeholders in the medical industry argue that it should fall under the Private Healthcare Facilities Act, emphasising that GPs are a professional service – not part of the retail sector governed by the Price Control and Anti-Profiteering Act.

The group of about 400 doctors also called for a review of GP consultation fees, which have been capped at RM10 (S\$3.10) to RM35 for 33 years – citing rising business costs as a major concern.

Dressed in black and some with stethoscopes around their necks, they gathered outside the Prime Minister's Office at 11am to submit a memorandum.

They held placards with messages such as “Is it fair for a GP to charge RM35 while a locksmith charges RM200 and a plumber, RM150?” and “Consultation fees have been frozen for 33 years, but nasi lemak's price has increased by 80 per cent since 2011”.

For many of the doctors, the protest was also about according their profession due respect.

Malaysia Medical Association president-elect R. Arasu, who was at the site, said the government should not equate private GPs with sundry shops, highlighting the complexity and cost involved in delivering medical services.

“We provide a professional service that includes patient registration, consultation, investigation and prescription,” Datuk Arasu said, adding that doctors “spend their prime years” studying and training to provide medical services and to open a private clinic. “The barrier to entry is very high.”

“Anyone can open a sundry shop. You can't compare a professional service to selling goods,” Dr Arasu told reporters after submitting the memorandum.

The new price display policy is aimed at promoting price transparency and empowering consumers. But there will be a three-month grace period when no compound fines will be issued, as clinics and doctors adjust to the new law. After that, failure to comply will result in a maximum fine of RM50,000 for individuals and RM100,000 for corporate bodies.

Dr Arasu said that private doctors in general are not opposed to the new law that requires the display of drug prices, as it is the patients' right to know.

But they take issue with how the law was enacted, saying it was done without proper consultation of the medical community. It was also put into force before the government made good on its go-ahead to revise GP consultation fees, which have not been reviewed since 1992.



*The group of about 400 doctors gathered outside the Prime Minister's Office at 11am on May 6 to submit a memorandum. ST PHOTO: LU WEI HOONG*

At the rally, Dr Hakim Mahdi, 33, told The Straits Times: “We feel betrayed. The Health Ministry had promised to increase consultation fees first. After years of study, we're charging RM10 to RM35 (for consultation) – while barbers already charge RM25 nowadays.”

Regarding the consultation fee review, Dr Arasu said that following a recent meeting, details are still being finalised by the government.

In March 2025, the Federation of Private Medical Practitioners' Associations Malaysia proposed that consultation fees be revised to a range of RM50 to RM150.

There have been concerns over the affordability of healthcare in Malaysia amid the higher cost of living and soaring health insurance premiums. On Jan 1, one of Malaysia's largest public hospitals serving much of the Klang Valley – University Malaysia Medical Centre – also hiked its fees for its services.

Still, the mandatory drug price display law is a welcome move that allows greater transparency, accountability and consumer empowerment in healthcare, said patients and consumer interest groups.

A joint statement by the Consumers' Association of Penang, Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations, Malaysia Rural and Ecology Consumers Association, Teras Pengupayaan Melayu and Kuala Lumpur Consumer Safety Association on May 2 noted that Malaysia's medical inflation rate was reaching 15 per cent, well above regional and global averages.

“(Transparent) pricing is a necessary first step towards curbing unjustified price hikes and protecting household budgets.” it said.

A 44-year-old patient who wanted to be known only as Mr Eng said he takes medication for his high cholesterol. He said the price transparency mechanism will help him make more informed choices.

“Now I can compare clinic and pharmacy prices, so I won't be overcharged again,” he said.