

# Long working hours among doctors require wider healthcare reforms, says

By **Hakim Mahari**

May 9, 2026 @ 12:16pm



*Malaysia's healthcare system must undergo broader reforms to address excessive working hours and improve conditions for doctors and healthcare workers, the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) said.*  
FILE PIC

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia's healthcare system must undergo broader reforms to address excessive working hours and improve conditions for doctors and healthcare workers, the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) said.

Its president Datuk Dr Thirunavukarasu Rajoo said reports of house officers working

up to 85 hours a week were deeply concerning and posed risks not only to doctors' welfare but also to patient safety.

He said house officers are in hospitals to be trained as safe and competent doctors, but exhaustion compromises both their ability to learn and the quality of care provided to patients.

"The immediate priority is clear: the 60 to 62-hour weekly cap must be enforced, not just on paper. Hospital directors must be held accountable for this," he said in a statement.

Thirunavukarasu said the MMA welcomed the reminder by Health director-general Datuk Dr Mahathar Abu Wahab to hospital directors regarding the flexible working hours system for house officers.

However, he said the directive itself was not new, and its re-emphasis reflected concerns that it had not been consistently implemented at ground level.

"The fact that it needs to be re-emphasised tells us something important — it has not been consistently followed on the ground."

He also said hospitals must honour house officers' leave entitlements, including annual and sick leave, which he described as rights under existing regulations rather than privileges.

"Denying or substituting them is not acceptable."

Thirunavukarasu said the country must confront deeper systemic issues behind excessive working hours, including chronic doctor shortages, inadequate staffing ratios and longstanding resource constraints within the healthcare system.

"A 60-hour week is still a heavy load for any healthcare worker. MMA's position has been consistent — Malaysia must move towards a maximum of 48 hours, and eventually 45 hours.

"To get there, we must address the systemic issues that make long hours persist."

He added that while directives are important, meaningful reform would require wider systemic changes across the healthcare sector.

"Directives remind. Systems reform. We need both."

Earlier, the Health Ministry directed hospitals nationwide to ensure house officers, or junior medical officers, work no more than [60 to 62 hours](#) a week under the government's flexible working system.

In a circular dated May 8 and issued to hospital directors, the ministry said the move was part of efforts to safeguard the welfare and rest periods of medical graduates while ensuring uninterrupted patient care and quality clinical training.

The directive followed confusion among healthcare administrators regarding the interpretation of the General Principles Guidelines on the Standardisation of the Flexible Working System introduced in 2019.

On Thursday, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said the ministry would issue a new circular on [working hours](#) for junior medical officers to strengthen governance and address concerns over excessive workloads among house officers.

Dzulkefly said the circular would reinforce existing flexi-working arrangements for house officers following reports that some were working between 65 and 85 hours a week.

Malaysian Medics International (MMI) highlighted the heavy workloads faced by junior doctors in Malaysia, saying they were significantly higher than in other countries.

According to the international group led by medical students, although the Health Ministry's flexi-system caps house officers' working hours at between 65 and 75 hours a week, chronic understaffing routinely pushes actual working hours far beyond the limit.