

# MMA: Open Up UiTM's Cardiothoracic Surgery Postgrad To Non-Bumi For National Interest

**By CodeBlue | 9 May 2024**

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) tells UiTM to open its cardiothoracic surgery postgrad programme to non-Bumi students “in the best interest of the health of the population”. MMA points out that UiTM has a postgrad programme for international students.



The Faculty of Medicine at the Sungai Buloh Campus of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) in Sungai Buloh, Selangor. Photo by Saw Siow Feng for CodeBlue, taken on April 22, 2024.

KUALA LUMPUR, May 9 — The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) today urged Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) to temporarily open admissions to its cardiothoracic surgery postgraduate programme to non-Bumiputera in the national interest.

The country's largest doctors' association cited [remarks by Prof Dr Raja Amin Raja Mokhtar](#) – who is on the Board of Studies of the cardiothoracic surgery postgraduate programme by a collaboration between UiTM and the National Heart Institute (IJN) – that legislative amendments are not needed for UiTM, which was formed under Article 153 of the Federal Constitution, to admit non-Bumiputera students.

In a recent interview with *CodeBlue*, Dr Raja Amin, who is a senior consultant cardiothoracic surgeon at the Department of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery at UiTM's Faculty of Medicine – had cited alternative routes for non-Bumiputera students, like the public university's private wing or the postgraduate programme for international students.

“If UiTM can open its doors to international students, we don't see why it can't open up to all fellow Malaysians, on a needs basis,” MMA president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz said in a statement.

“In the best interest of the health of the population, UiTM should consider the suggestion to temporarily open up its cardiothoracic surgery postgraduate programme to non-Bumiputeras.

“It should be putting the needs of the people first. We are facing acute shortages in specialists and cardiothoracic surgeons are one of the specialisations most in demand.”

Dr Raja Amin had made the proposal to open admissions to the UiTM-IJN cardiothoracic surgery postgraduate programme to non-Bumiputera for a limited period as a solution to the parallel pathway imbroglio.

Last December, the Malaysian Medical Council (MMC) rejected applications by four pioneer graduates of the cardiothoracic surgery parallel pathway programme to register as specialists on the National Specialist Register (NSR), on the basis of not recognising their Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in Cardiothoracic Surgery qualification.

MMA pointed out that patients are waiting between six months and a year for a heart bypass surgery in public hospitals. “Some die while waiting”.

With the high prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), the doctors' group expects an increase in the number of people needing such life-saving procedures.

“Everyone is impacted by shortages in specialists. As it stands, we don't think we will be able to meet the target of 28,000 medical specialists by 2030,” Dr Azizan said.

“We need UiTM to support efforts to produce more cardiothoracic surgeons by opening it up to all Malaysians who wish to specialise. Health care should never be politicised.”

*Malaysiakini* [reported](#) UiTM vice-chancellor Shahrin Sahib as saying yesterday that the university was committed to upholding the UiTM Act 1976 and Article 153 of the Federal Constitution that guarantees the “special position” of the Malays and natives of Sabah and Sarawak.

However, Shahrin also said UiTM would accept whatever decision by the government and the Ministry of Higher Education, with the consent of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, if there is a national need, as he described the university merely as a “body of implementation”.

At the same event, UiTM board of directors chairman Raduan Che Rose told reporters that if the UiTM-IJN cardiothoracic surgery postgraduate programme is opened to non-Malays, it would only be a “one-off” admission and involve only a “small number” of non-Malay trainees.

Last week, [Higher Education Minister Zambry Abdul Kadir](#) – who is also an Umno supreme council member – denied there were any official discussions on opening admissions to the UiTM-IJN cardiothoracic surgery postgraduate programme to non-Bumiputera, saying a few “fundamental issues” must be resolved first.

Malay nationalist groups, as well as a few Umno leaders like [Armand Azha Abu Hanifah](#) and [Khaidhirah Abu Zahar](#), have opposed opening up UiTM to non-Bumiputera students.

[Senator Dr RA Lingeshwaran](#) – who is from the DAP that touts itself as a multiracial party – told *CodeBlue* in an interview that UiTM was “treading a dangerous slope”, saying that UiTM should remain a Bumiputera-exclusive university, while non-Bumiputera could take the parallel pathway training.