



MMA calls for stronger oversight over telemedicine arrangements

Yesterday

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The association has raised the red flag over a recent corporate collaboration offering 24/7 services.



MMA president Dr R Thirunavukarasu said while the Malaysian Medical Council has clear ethical telemedicine guidelines, enforcement remained complaint-driven. (MMA pic)

PETALING JAYA:

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has urged the health ministry to be more proactive in strengthening healthcare regulation, particularly to “urgently close” what it says are loopholes in teleconsultation and corporate healthcare arrangements.

MMA president Dr R Thirunavukarasu called for stronger oversight mechanisms to protect patients and ensure transparency and accountability.

He said the association noted an increasing trend in recent weeks of corporate entities and third-party administrators (TPAs) “making decisions that interfere with medical judgment and patient care”.

Thirunavukarasu said this “troubling pattern” was most recently seen in a collaboration between an insurance company and a pharmacy group offering 24/7 telehealth services, including doctor consultations and “instant” prescriptions via a mobile application.

While he did not specify the collaboration in question, he said that this is not the first of such collaborations.

“MMA has been informed that a TPA is involved in facilitating these services and that similar arrangements involving some of the same entities had taken place in previous years.

“Teleconsultation plays an important role in improving access and convenience for patients, especially when delivered responsibly and with proper clinical judgment.

“However, when it is driven primarily by commercial contracts and cost-control motives rather than patient safety, it becomes a threat rather than an innovation,” he said.

Thirunavukarasu said the recent announcement of 24/7 teleconsultations, instant digital prescriptions and nationwide medication delivery under a TPA-managed scheme “raises serious questions about who is ensuring clinical accountability, continuity of care and adherence to professional standards”.

He said MMA was concerned with the lack of regulatory enforcement and the growing commercialisation of clinical decisions, and while the Malaysian Medical Council has clear ethical telemedicine guidelines, enforcement remained complaint-driven.

“Unless a patient takes the initiative to report a problem, no action is taken. This creates an environment where doctors may unknowingly, or in some cases willingly, compromise their duty of care under corporate pressure.

“Some are even providing clinical directives or prescriptions through platforms that do not guarantee adequate assessment or follow-up.

“Doctors must remember that the same ethical and professional responsibilities apply whether a consultation is face-to-face or online. Every diagnosis, prescription or medical decision carries legal and moral accountability,” he said.