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Contract doctors' woes in Budget 2022 winding-up or face worse backlash

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BY SHAHRIN AIZAT NOORSHAHIRAM



MMA said that this group of doctors whose contracts will be expiring next month are feeling great anxiety for their future, and the aftermath of unresolved issues could impact the country's healthcare industry. — AFP pic

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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 17 — Putrajaya should give clear solutions to long-standing problems faced by contract doctors in the winding-up of Budget 2022, or risk even greater backlash, the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) warned today.

MMA said that this group of doctors whose contracts will be expiring next month are feeling great anxiety for their future, and the aftermath of unresolved issues could impact the country's healthcare industry.

"Many of the contract doctors' contracts will be ending by year end which is in a matter of days. Up to now, there has been no information given on the status of these contracts for many doctors.

"There is fear and anxiety among these contract doctors of being terminated," MMA president Dr Koh Kar Chai said in a statement.

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He suggested that the Public Service Department offer these contract doctors more positions in government hospitals while looking at a 10-year contract extension instead of two years.

"This would save the time spent on all the administrative issues that are currently being faced to renew contracts.

"The 10 years are also to allow contract doctors to pursue specialisation and at least provide some job security which is an issue," he added.

He also noted that the current batch of contract doctors were not eligible for Higher Learning Programmes despite the matter having been mentioned in Parliament.

Following that, the medical group suggested that doctors be allowed for Hadiyah Latihan Persekutuan scholarship while getting full paid study leave for recognised programmes.

Dr Koh also suggested that healthcare workers' annual leaves that have been frozen to cushion the impact of Covid-19 pandemic be allowed to carry forward for another two years and be used within those years.

"This may be an administrative issue that should be sorted out internally however, the issue is also contributing to growing dissatisfaction and disappointment with the system among healthcare workers especially after many had served on the frontlines in managing the pandemic for coming on to two years," he said.

The medical group further urged the government to settle doctors' claims after a survey conducted by MMA found that many doctors were receiving their claims late, while some were not paid their claims and were given the excuse that there was "no budget".

Yesterday, the team behind the #HartalDoktorKontrak (HDK) movement said it is planning a symbolic "mass resignation" if the government refuses to hire the remaining 22,288 contract doctors permanently by December.

HDK spokesman Dr Muhammad Yassin said it is planning a strike after the previous walkout, where contract doctors will now hold placards saying "mass resignation", *Utusan Malaysia* reported.

Last month, the Financial Ministry announced that it will extend the contract of more than 10,000 medical doctors, dentists and pharmacists to four years from the initial two years.

Finance Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Zafrul Abdul Aziz said this was to ensure the continuity of their studies.

He said the government has allocated RM100 million for some of them to further their education by pursuing specialist training.

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