

A Word from the President

I was saddened to hear of a 32-year-old medical assistant who died after falling from the third floor of the Raja Permaisuri Bainun Hospital (HRPB) building here in Ipoh last month. It is reported that the man, from Chemor, was suffering from a health condition and decided not to burden his family with it.

It was also upsetting to read about the conditions doctors have to work in at Hospital Sungai Buloh – the main COVID-19 hub. A doctor working there had penned a letter titled *“A tired doctor from Sg Buloh asks to be treated humanely”*. The anonymous letter published online by Malaysiakini described how basic amenities such as on-call rooms, on-call food and even a place to rest are not provided for doctors working round the clock to manage the record high patient load at the government hospital. MMA views these issues seriously and will continue to fight on for improvements to be made in our government doctor's work environment.

Last month we highlighted in the media that long-standing human resource issues in government healthcare must be addressed in the fight against COVID-19 and beyond. While we acknowledge efforts by the government to enhance healthcare with the PERMAI stimulus package announced last month, these long standing issues which include permanent positions, contract extensions, UD 41 and UD 43/44 grade harmonisation, critical allowances, excess leave and other issues affecting healthcare workers must not be ignored.

These issues will have an impact on the standard of care, and not to mention mental health, of the country's healthcare workforce. MMA had written officially to the Prime Minister and hopes a meeting can be held soon to find a solution to these issues.

While we recognise and welcome the PERMAI initiative, in our statement issued to the media, we asked the government to provide clarity on whether the 3,500 increase in medical personnel under the initiative refers to permanent or contract positions, and if there are any positions created for doctors. Do look out for updates on this.



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Separately, we are pleased that the government has finally reached out to private healthcare for help in managing the pandemic. At the time of writing, finer details are being finalised between private hospitals and the health ministry with a plan to integrate public and

private hospitals in the management of serious cases of COVID-19 beginning end of January. MMA welcomes this move and hopes there will also soon be discussions with the private GPs on their role in managing COVID-19.

Now that there is an increase in community transmissions reported, the 7,000 MOH trained private GPs who are well distributed in the country should be roped-in to assist the government's efforts in screening the community for COVID-19.

Recently, the health ministry had stated that it will now only screen symptomatic close contacts of COVID-19 positive cases. MMA disagrees with this approach as there will still be risk of infections spreading from asymptomatic close contacts. We have urged MOH to revert to its earlier policy for contact tracing – with the help of private GPs.

The 7,000 MOH trained GPs have only recently been roped in to help with the screening of foreign workers under SOCSO's mandatory screening of foreign workers programme. A number of cases are being detected now at these mass screenings. Imagine the difference it would have made had the government involved the GPs from the very beginning.

Going forward, I wish to express my deep concern over the health of all our healthcare colleagues who are directly involved in the fight against COVID-19. As many of you would know, we have reached a critical level in our public healthcare system with no sign of

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improvement in the number of new cases being reported.

Going by trend in cases, there is a possibility that it will take much longer than anticipated to flatten the curve. The health ministry had hoped that the number of infections would be reduced in the two

weeks under the MCO, but it has now been extended to 4 February 2020.

In managing the surge in cases, we have proposed that the government should also look into increasing the number of quarantine centres to manage mild and certain asymptomatic cases of COVID-19 that are unsuitable for home quarantine. We have also proposed that state governments assist in these efforts. Our MMA state branches should provide assistance in any way they can.

Community involvement will also be key in managing the pandemic. The public must understand the quarantine system for either homes or centres and the right to privacy of those on quarantine.

Aside from this, I wish to encourage members to keep in touch and inform SCHOMOS and PPSMMA on any issues you are currently facing – we will do our best to find ways to address them. We will also continue to remind MOH on outstanding issues until they are resolved. Do take good care of yourselves and do not hesitate to ask for help when you need it.

Lastly, to all our Chinese members celebrating Chinese New Year, I wish to take this opportunity to wish you Gong Xi Fa Cai! The celebrations may be different from the usual, but I do hope you will still have an enjoyable time celebrating.

Wishing you better days ahead! Take care and stay safe! **BMMMA**