

A Word from the President

May was a nightmare month for the country with cases of COVID-19 skyrocketing to over 6,000 cases daily. Selangor and more particularly the Klang Valley was the worst hit with daily cases of COVID-19 between 1,500 - 2,000. ICU wards at public hospitals are almost at full capacity and healthcare workers are once again overwhelmed with the recurring nightmare of severely ill COVID-19 patients filling up the wards, in urgent need of hospitalisation.

But this time it is worse! The number of deaths and the number of Brought in Dead (BID) cases have increased. The health ministry however, has yet to establish from post mortem if any of the deaths were linked to the newer variants of COVID-19, namely the South African and the Indian variant, which had been reported in a few cases in the country.

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) had expressed concern that with the limited community screenings done on the population, we may not know the extent of community transmissions in the country and on if the newer variants were partly responsible for the latest surge.

However, the state of Selangor has stepped up testing. These mass screenings of the community needs to be on a much larger scale as other states are now starting to show signs of rising infections. A more efficient way to comb through the population for COVID-19 would be to engage the 8,000 private GPs who are well distributed nationwide and are close to the communities. If you recall, we have been proposing mass screenings of the community by the private GPs since last year.

There is an urgent need now to intensify efforts in testing, contact tracing and isolating of COVID-19 positive patients. As we have suggested, the government should look into roping in the housemen, medical students, nursing students and medical assistants with some basic medical knowledge to help with contact tracing. The quicker we trace positive cases and isolate them, the better our hopes in reducing the number of cases and flattening the curve.



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All volunteers must also be vaccinated before they are accepted to carry out any work at healthcare facilities.

As I write this, the Defence Minister had just announced tighter restrictions under MCO 3.0. Earlier, there was much speculation and anxiety among the public on whether a full lockdown similar to restrictions under MCO1.0 would be brought back.

MMA's stand on this, is that a lockdown should be a last resort. The government should do all it can to mass-test the community and speed up the National Immunisation Programme (NIP) to really be able to see notable results. Additional funds will also be needed to boost ICU capacity, medical equipment and resources as more severe cases of COVID-19 are increasing.

Most importantly, the level of SOP compliance among the public including Members of Parliament must improve. Leaders must walk the talk and be shining examples to the people to be taken seriously.

Lastly, on behalf of all my colleagues in General Practice, I wish to express my disappointment on the slow progress in on-boarding the private GPs to vaccinate the population under the NIP. Around 2,500 GPs had registered with PROTECTHEALTH for the programme and 5,000 (GPs and staff) had received training but only 37 were on-boarded. The programme was to begin in early May and we are heading into June as I now write this. The reason for this is unclear.

The rest of the private GPs are ready but waiting to be on-boarded. Once the vaccination programme kicks-off, it will see 75,000 vaccinations per day. At three days per week, 900,000 people will be vaccinated each month. I am confident, this number will increase as more GPs have expressed their interest in participating. Our PPS section has targeted around 5,000 to participate in the programme coordinated by PROTECTHEALTH under the Health Ministry.

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Going forward, it is hoped the government will do all it can to speed up this programme as the participation of private GPs will be an important component in boosting vaccination uptake in the country.

The NIP must be speeded up or we will continue to struggle with the poor SOP compliance issues we continue to see to this day.

We applaud the Selangor government for their recent move to provide a way for employers in the state to purchase vaccines for their staff. Such a move should be welcomed and extended to other states who wish to boost uptake in their respective states.

Finally before I end, I wish to inform all members that the Health Ministry has reached out to MMA for volunteers to help with efforts on the ground to manage COVID-19. A letter on this has been sent to all members. We would greatly appreciate if you could kindly reply to our HGS on if you would be willing to participate.

Stay safe! **BMMA**