

A Word from the President

Before I begin, I wish to first congratulate my old friend and colleague who is also MMA's Immediate Past President Dr N. Ganabaskaran on being awarded a Datukship in recognition of his dedicated service and contribution to the country. This is indeed great news. Well done and I wish you all the best in this new chapter.

And speaking of news, some long awaited news for all Malaysians has finally come. The first batch of the Pfizer BioNtech vaccines arrived at 9.57am on 21 February at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport's Advanced Cargo Centre (ACC) to much fanfare. I could almost see Tattoo from the 1980s TV hit series Fantasy Island running up the tower to ring the bell announcing "the Plane! the Plane!" as the plane carrying the 312,390 doses of vaccine touched down on the runway.

Three days later, the Prime Minister became the first Malaysian to be vaccinated followed by the Health DG, and the country is now into Phase 1 of the COVID-19 National Immunisation Programme, where medical and certain non-medical frontliners will be vaccinated. Malaysia has set a target of inoculating 80% of its 32 million strong population by February 2022 or earlier, in its COVID-19 National Immunisation Programme.

MOH has identified over 600 vaccination centres to carry out its programme and we are delighted to hear that private GPs will also be involved in its plan to vaccinate the population. The Health Minister has recently met with our HGS Dr Arasu to discuss the GPs involvement in the NIP, management of home quarantine for category 1 and 2 cases of COVID-19 as well as other matters. It is hoped that the details can be finalised soon as the 2nd phase of the NIP will begin in April and this will require proper logistical planning with the GPs.

As for the situation concerning government healthcare workers, last month, together with our SCHOMOS division, we wrote officially to all 220 MPs for their support. In our letter, we highlighted the urgent need to address



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manpower issues in government healthcare facilities and the various issues affecting our colleagues in government service.

The letter was published on a number of online news portals but sadly, only one MP - the MP for Kulai who was the former Deputy Minister of Education (YB Teo Nie Ching) responded. YB expressed her support for our government healthcare workers and this was published in Malaysiakini, CodeBlue, The Malaysian Insight as well as other online news platforms. The MMA wishes to thank YB Teo Nie Ching for her support and hopes that more MPs will do the same.

Rest assured that MMA will keep pushing for the urgently needed boost in manpower in our public healthcare sector. We will continue to highlight our concerns and will not stop till these needs are met.

It is indeed saddening to hear of colleagues not being able to take a break or go on annual leave for a whole year since the country was hit with the pandemic due to manpower shortages. On top of that, their unused annual leave was forfeited! Understandably, their services are needed now to manage COVID-19 but we have been understaffed even before the pandemic.

Apart from physical fatigue, a number of government healthcare workers are experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and burnout. I have been informed that as a result of them being overworked, some are experiencing relationship issues

with their spouse and family. All these issues must be brought up when parliament reconvenes.

In the coming weeks, we will be focusing on the role of GPs in the NIP, and will continue efforts to engage with MOH on issues affecting government healthcare workers.

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I do hope that as cases are expected to dip with the start of the vaccination programme, there will soon be an opportunity to have a face-to-face meet with the Health Minister. I do believe that the way forward in addressing issues is through close engagement with the government, which we will work closely with as MMA has always done. As the largest doctor's group in the

country, we will highlight issues when the need arises as we have a duty and responsibility to uphold and protect our profession.

Lastly, it is my sincere hope that the Health Ministry and even healthcare practitioners will begin to view public and private healthcare as part of the country's overall healthcare system. The pandemic had opened up more talks for public-private healthcare collaboration and we should not stop there. We should regularly engage and continue to explore these possibilities that can improve healthcare services for the *rakyat*.

We need to work together as one healthcare system.

Wishing you a fabulous Month of March! **BMMA**