

Criticisms on downplaying bullying cases unfair, says MMA

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PETALING JAYA: Criticisms that the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) is downplaying bullying cases is unfair, says the body.

MMA president Dr Koh Kar Chai said the association has been actively addressing the issue of bullying among healthcare workers for many years.

The MMA had even set up its own helpline called HelpDoc in 2016 for those in the medical fraternity to report cases of bullying, said Dr Koh.

He was responding to a report published on news portal Free Malaysia Today titled "Junior Doctors Accuse MMA of Playing Down Bullying Cases" and also comments by Penang Deputy Chief Minister II P. Ramasamy to MalaysiaKini, which criticised the MMA for not being in touch with reality.

"We find these criticisms levelled against us as very unfair, as MMA has been actively addressing the issue of bullying among healthcare workers for many years.

"It is clear that both the HDK (Hartal Doktor Kontrak) group and the Penang Deputy Chief Minister II had not read MMA's full press statement issued on Tuesday (May 10), nor did they witness our press conference held on Tuesday.

"The comments they made seem to be based on a few media reports they read and not our full press statement," said Dr Koh in a statement on Wednesday (May 11).

Dr Koh said that the MMA was reiterating its stance that it does not condone any form of bullying.

"What we are saying is that it is time that bullying be properly defined so as to be able to identify genuine cases of bullying to allow appropriate action to be taken on the perpetrators," he added.

All cases of bullying need to be reported for action to be taken, said Dr Koh.

He also said that though there has been much that has been mentioned on social media, only a handful has actually been reported, but it does not mean that there are only a few cases.

"It may be the tip of an iceberg and this is indeed cause for worry and concern," said Dr Koh, adding that those affected by bullying should not remain silent.

Dr Koh said that MMA had understood there was a reluctance to report through normal channels and it had set up its own helpline called HelpDoc in 2016.

Thus, Dr Koh said it was unfair to label MMA as being unaware of the current situation, as the MMA had the foresight to initiate actions on this.

"MMA has never played down the issue of bullying, hence the call was made to end the culture of fear within the Health Ministry.

"However, we wish to once again state that medical practice is a highly stressful profession involving patients who may be in a life and death situation.

"The stressors at work involve everyone on the team, both from the consultants down to the house officers," said Dr Koh.

Thus, teamwork is essential in the provision of healthcare, he added.