

Doctors' groups clash over GEG bill

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Dr Steven Chow (left) says Malaysia must first embark on a 'meaningful' tobacco harm reduction programme, while Dr Koh Kar Chai believes prevention is the best method.

PETALING JAYA: Two doctors' groups have clashed over the Generational End Game (GEG) bill, with one calling for caution over the proposed law and the other urging Putrajaya to press on with it.

Citing similar initiatives by Australia and New Zealand to bring about a generational ban on the use of tobacco products, the Federation of Private Medical Practitioners' Associations Malaysia (FPMPAM) said they were developed nations that had long-established processes to counter such addiction, including tobacco harm reduction (THR) programmes.

FPMPAM president Dr Steven Chow pointed out that Malaysia had yet to embark on any "meaningful" programmes on tobacco harm reduction and said the bill also disregarded scientific data on its effectiveness.

Maintaining that he agreed with the goal of the bill, Chow warned that pressing ahead with its enactment without preparatory work would be a "dangerous social experiment".

"Smoking, vaping and the use of tobacco products have major health consequences and are addictions. Like all addictions, they are amenable to proper medical intervention and treatment by specially trained professionals and not by criminalising the addict.

"We would appeal to our legislators to consider, firstly, whether we are taking a shortcut to GEG without the benefit of prior sustainable and policy-driven programmes based on THR.

"We also ask that they consider making medical intervention as the focus of its smoking and vaping cessation policy and not criminalisation," he said in a statement.

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) said, however, that the health ministry should go ahead with the bill as protecting the health of Malaysians was the right thing to do.

Dismissing certain sectors' dissatisfaction with the bill, MMA president Dr Koh Kar Chai said the nation would have economic gains by saving people from bearing the burden of diseases associated with the use of tobacco and vape.

"Addiction is a disease that is extremely difficult to treat and we believe that prevention is the best method. We need to prevent early addiction by not allowing our young to pick up the unhealthy habit.

"To all MPs, don't let the majority down. We believe, after going through two years of the pandemic, most Malaysians would agree that attaining and maintaining good health is of vital importance.

"We wish to say to the public that if you are a parent and want the best for your children, support the GEG," he said in a statement.

Last week, health minister Khairy Jamaluddin tabled the Tobacco and Smoking Control Bill, which seeks to prohibit the sale of cigarettes, tobacco, and vape products to anyone born after 2007.

On Saturday, Khairy said there would be no criminal records or jail terms for those who contravened the GEG law once it was enforced, with offenders only compounded a maximum RM50 fine.