

Doctors urge govt to consider more placements to avoid medical talent exodus

By [JUNAID IBRAHIM](#)

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PETALING JAYA: While the government's recent offer of permanent posts to 4,053 contract healthcare workers has been welcomed, Hartal Doktor Kontrak wants the welfare of those who didn't get their letters be looked into.

The movement's spokesman Dr Muhammad Yassin said although the number is significant, it constitutes less than half of those eligible to apply for permanent medical posts.

The success rate is 47% of the 8,672 applications received.

"The number 4,053 may seem high, but we haven't included those from many junior batches with an intake of about 5,000 to 6,000 doctors per year.

"For every doctor who got the permanent offer, another contract doctor didn't make it and their future is uncertain.

"And many of them are approaching the final year of their contracts," he said when contacted.

Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin announced on Tuesday that the applications for permanent positions for 4,053 healthcare workers in the public service have been approved and the group is set to report for duty on Oct 17.

The approved applications consist of 3,215 medical officers, 438 dental officers and 400 pharmacists; 225 others are reserved.

Dr Muhammad, however, expressed the movement's gratitude to Khairy for his efforts.

He said the discussion and decision on improving the incentives of contract officers must be urgently addressed to prevent an exodus of healthcare workers from the public sector.

"If all of these doctors leave government service, we will be short of almost 4,000 doctors and I don't think our healthcare system can cope with it," he added.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Koh Kar Chai concurred, saying that the country cannot afford to lose the talent, and he called on the young doctors to persevere.

“We sincerely hope that proposed incentives for the contract doctors are significant enough to make them want to stay within the ministry as contract officers, and that there will still be opportunities for the contract doctors who wish to further their careers by becoming specialists.

“Our country cannot afford to lose these bright young talents to others.

“We encourage all contract doctors to not give up hope, and to continue to give their best as healthcare professionals. We believe this will help should the government allow reapplications,” he said.

Meanwhile, Dr Muhammad, who was himself one of the contract doctors, said he was relieved after waiting for almost four years to finally be offered a permanent post, but felt sad for his colleagues who did not succeed.

“I feel relieved and happy that the long wait for stability is coming to an end.

“But at the same time there’s great sadness in knowing that many of my close friends did not make it, despite them being brilliant medical officers,” said Dr Muhammad, who is serving at Hospital Port Dickson in Negri Sembilan.

Previously, Khairy said the ministry was in talks with the Public Service Commission to consider allowing candidates who did not get permanent positions to reapply the following year.

The minister also said they would ensure these contract doctors received better incentives while allowing them to continue with their specialist or sub-specialist training.

In his announcement on Tuesday, Khairy said his ministry will open its eplacement systems, namely the e-Houseman, e-Dentist and e-Pharmacist, from mid-September to enable officers to make an online selection of placement upon receiving the offer of permanent appointment.

The officers will be notified of the opening of the eplacement systems one week in advance via email.