

Expert: Medical line is not for all

By **Adib Povera** - May 12, 2022 @ 9:15am



A health expert agreed with the Malaysian Medical Association's (MMA) proposal that a pre-entrance screening in the form of an aptitude test be introduced for those seeking to further their studies in medicine. - NSTP file pic

KUALA LUMPUR: A health expert agreed with the Malaysian Medical Association's (MMA) proposal that a pre-entrance screening in the form of an aptitude test be introduced for those seeking to further their studies in medicine.

Datuk Dr N.K.S. Tharmaseelan said the medical line was not for all and that many did not realise the profession required a lot of sacrifice to serve humanity and the nation.

"It (enrolling into medical courses) is not like the 'now everyone can fly' concept," said Dr Tharmaseelan, using AirAsia's tagline to explain the demanding nature of the medical courses and profession.

Many Malaysians, he said, were doing medicine out of parental pressure, peer pressure and other reasons, including the false notion that one could make "tonnes of money".

"Some of them do not have the aptitude or attitude, or even the humility in becoming a doctor. They do not comprehend or understand the sacrifices, the stress and the long working hours for a paltry salary in pursuing a medical career."

Dr Tharmaseelan, who was the MMA president from 2013 to 2014, said many countries, especially Western countries such as the United States, had an entrance examination for students seeking medical college admission.

He said in Asia, India had introduced the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET).

Dr Tharmaseelan explained that the NEET was a pre-medical entrance examination for students who wished to pursue an undergraduate medical (MBBS) course in any private or government institution in India.

"The qualification is also mandated for those pursuing a medical degree abroad. Only after passing the NEET examination can one apply for the application forms for any medical college.

"In addition, many colleges conduct a face-to-face interview to gauge whether a student has the right aptitude, attitude and maturity to do medicine."

Dr Tharmaseelan described medicine as a "very demanding profession" that would require years of study, effort, money and, of course, stress.

"It becomes a humongous waste should one drop out either during college or during the housemanship once it dawns on them the reality (of doing medicine)."

The MMA had, on Tuesday, revealed that the attrition rate among house officers was at least 26 per cent.

Dr Tharmaseelan said the "unofficial figure" could be as high as 50 per cent.

"In addition, those who stay on to do their housemanship have been 'traumatised', 'bullied' and 'demoralised'. The future becomes bleak for them and their families.

"So it is a no-brainer to have a pre-entrance examination for those who want to become doctors."

The screening test is one of several recommendations by the MMA to ease pressure on the public healthcare system, eliminate bullying of junior doctors and avoid a recurrence of last month's tragedy that befell a trainee doctor.

The MMA has also said it would renew calls for the government to have a unified examination so that fresh medical graduates can be on the same level before they commenced housemanship.

Dr Tharmaseelan noted that the proposal to have the unified examination for all medical graduates, including for those graduating abroad, had been floated for decades now.

"It will certainly make it a level field for all. The legal profession has the CLP examination for all foreign and local law graduates (with some exceptions) before they do the pupillage.

"The dropout rate from pupillage is minimal. It is a tried-and-tested formula for the legal profession and it should be introduced for the medical profession."