

Govt decision to grant housemen benefits lauded

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PETALING JAYA: The government's move to extend the "Fare to Return to Region of Origin" facility to contract healthcare workforce officers undergoing housemanship has been a long time coming and will show that they are being appreciated, said Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Koh Kar Chai.

He said the move was a welcomed decision as the association has been asking for benefits for contract doctors.

"For housemen, having special medical assignment leave and tuberculosis, leprosy and cancer leave will show that they are being appreciated as part of the healthcare workforce. This sort of leave had never been given to housemen before."

Koh was commenting on Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin's announcement on Wednesday that the government has agreed to extend benefits and special medical assignment leave and tuberculosis, leprosy and cancer leave to medical, dental and pharmacy officers on contract service who were undergoing housemanship.

Koh said the benefits may serve as an incentive to improve productivity, which could lead to an improvement in services at public hospitals.

However, he added that this was only one of the many steps needed to further improve workforce morale and satisfaction.

"Burnout is an entirely different issue that may need to be looked at objectively. With the transition to the endemicity of Covid-19, we hope that incidences of burnout can be reduced further.

"These benefits are not meant as a breather or break from work to re-energise. Special medical assignment leave only applies for work done in certain high-risk units and the tuberculosis, leprosy and cancer leave only applies to those who suffer from such ailments," Koh told *theSun*.

He said all housemen were still required to fulfil the term requirements of the housemen training period to be eligible for full registration as a medical doctor.

Khairy said the Cabinet on July 14 last year agreed to extend the benefits to officers who had their contracts extended after completing their housemanship.

"In line with continuous efforts and our commitment to improving the welfare of contract officers, the Health Ministry at the Cabinet meeting presented another memorandum for their consideration so that existing benefits are improved."

He expressed hope the decision to extend the leave benefits would address the imbalance among contract officers currently undergoing housemanship and those who have completed it.