

## Hospital wards urgently need repair



Room for improvement: Third-class wards in hospitals around the country are in dire need of repairs and upgrades, say health experts.

PETALING JAYA: Both facility upgrades and holistic policy changes must go hand-in-hand in addressing overcrowding at public hospital's third-class wards, say health services experts.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz said years of neglect had left these wards across the country in a state of disrepair.

"Our public healthcare colleagues had shared about ceilings that were in need of refurbishing such as leaking ceilings with fungus forming on some of the walls.

"Proper plumbing is also needed as many of the water pipes are rusting and need upgrading," she said.

She also highlighted the lack of amenities and ventilation at these wards.

"Some of the bed panels are outdated and in need of an upgrade while there are also plenty of beds with the hydraulics not working," she said.

Dr Azizan also said the lack of air conditioning in most of the old third-class wards are a concern "as patients are left exposed to the outside air as the doors and windows are usually left wide open".

She said the government should look into reducing the red tape involved in the process to request for maintenance and upgrades of public hospital wards.

"A full audit needs to be carried out on all public healthcare facilities nationwide for a proper assessment so that funds can be allocated accordingly for repairs, maintenance and upgrades," she added.

Former Johor Health Department director Dr Selahuddeen Abd Aziz said having a sufficient number of staff was key to tackling overcrowding in third-class wards.

"The number of staff employed to the beds needs to be proportionate to ensure medical services provided are efficient so that patients recover quickly," he said.

He said the government should also increase its health awareness campaigns.

"Preventive medicine through health awareness campaigns and education is key to reducing the rate of non-communicable diseases among the public as these patients make up many of those in the third-class wards," he said.

Medical Practitioners Coalition Association of Malaysia president Dr Raj Kumar Maharajah called for the integration of modern technology into healthcare systems for public hospital wards.

"Patients facing lower risk should be allowed to be monitored from home through the use of virtual monitoring technology which the patient can be provided with.

"Not only will this reduce unnecessary hospital admissions, it will also empower and teach patients how to monitor their own health.

"This opens up more beds for serious cases while also saving patients' time and money, providing them with the convenience, and avoiding the risk of catching a disease from other patients," he said, adding that mobile teams could also be sent for physical check-ups of patients at their homes.

Public health medicine specialist Dr Aidalina Mahmud said wards upgrades should also be centred on improving caregivers' welfare.

"The available space, furnishings and facilities like bathrooms must be improved while privacy for patients should be ensured with adequate screens or curtains around beds," she said.

"Staff welfare must also be addressed with provisions for a clean and adequate prayer space and a well-equipped pantry while safety measures in areas such as bathrooms and balconies are critical to prevent accidents."

Former MMA president Dr N.G. Baskaran said ward upgrades should also include facilities to reduce the risk of disease spreading.

"The bathrooms must be upgraded for easy usage by patients, and easy to clean for cleaning staff to ensure cleanliness is maintained at all times.

"Many of the simple medical apparatus for emergency treatment should also be modernised," he said.

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