

'Housemanship review is needed'

By [ADIB POVERAKUALA LUMPUR](#): The heavy responsibilities and duties of trainee doctors, while meant to build mental strength, should not be treated as a licence to abuse them. - May 9, 2022 @ 9:00am



Malaysian Muslim Doctors Organisation president Dr Boi Saidi Abd Razak says the organisation is concerned over the alleged bullying of junior health professionals.

Malaysian Muslim Doctors Organisation (Perdim) president Dr Boi Saidi Abd Razak said the education and teaching process was to build strong character, but it had no definitive limits and was open to abuse.

"The training of a soldier differs from that of a teacher. The teaching of a doctor is different from that of an accountant.

"What is important is that trainee doctors should be trained to harness their skills to save lives and provide the best services to the people," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Dr Boi Saidi said Perdim was concerned over alleged bullying of junior health professionals that came to light following the death of a houseman last month. The case, he said, must be addressed immediately.

"The system under which junior health doctors function comprises a group vulnerable to bullying, causing them to be stressed easily.

"Junior doctors have to undergo six postings. They have to work for more than 16 hours for a period of between one and two weeks in each new posting.

"These doctors do not have time to rest or have a meal while completing their postings."

In Malaysia, a trainee doctor has to undergo housemanship before being fully licensed and confirmed as a medical practitioner.

Every houseman will go through six postings every four months. The postings are with the General Medicine Department, General Surgery Department, Orthopaedics Department, Paediatrics Department, Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department and the Emergency or Anaesthesiology or Psychiatry or Family Medicine (Health Clinic) Department.

Perdim proposes a review of the trainee doctors' internship.

"A commission should also be set up and perhaps placed under the National Labour Council to check if the posting system involving trainee doctors is in line with the Labour Act.

"We would like to also propose a royal commission comprising representatives from agencies outside the Health Ministry to investigate the bullying of junior doctors.

"Perdim would also like to propose a 24-hour hotline for trainee doctors to report bullying incidents."

Dr Boi Saidi said those responsible for the death of the houseman should face legal action.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian Health Coalition (MHC) urged the Health Ministry to implement firm steps to create a healthy working environment in public hospitals and clinics.

MHC said such an environment entailed a work culture that encouraged quality, learning and growth, and was anti-bullying and anti-discrimination.

A healthy workplace was one where communication went two ways, and the welfare of each member was accorded priority, it said.

"While we understand that junior health professionals must work longer-than-average hours to learn skills and improve competence, we urge a balance that protects their wellbeing and mental health," it said.

"There are ways to teach, inspire and motivate juniors without being abusive.

"Senior (health) leaders must take responsibility to build safe workspaces and actively address toxic workplace behaviour.

"Health professionals must be made aware of the resources available for support, and all feedback must be received and investigated without fear of repercussions."

MHC said it welcomed the ministry's decision to form a task force to investigate the death of the houseman.

"We urge immediate and strong steps towards a positive working culture in all healthcare institutions. We must protect the health professionals who are protecting the health of the people."

Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin had, on Friday, announced that an independent task force would be set up to probe into the death of the houseman and claims of the prevalence of a bullying culture in departments.

Khairy said he had received an early report on the death from the head of the trainee doctors' department.

Penang Health director Dr Ma'arof Sudin was quoted as saying that the trainee doctor was placed at Penang Hospital on April 4 and fell to his death on April 17 from a residential building.

MHC said health professionals were still experiencing "tremendous stresses" as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"These stresses add to the existing stresses of an overloaded, understaffed and underfunded public healthcare system, even before Covid.

"If these stresses are not managed well, the wellbeing and the work quality of healthcare staff will be affected. That will affect patient care."