

MMA: Stress is part of the job

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Wednesday, 11 May 2022

KUALA LUMPUR: Being a doctor is not easy and this is reflected in the stress and long working hours of housemanship programmes, says the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA).

“Those who are not cut out to be medical doctors will just quit as can be seen in the high rate of attrition during housemanship of at least 26%,” said its president Dr Koh Kar Chai.

However, he said the current system should remain while bullying and its causes are addressed.

“But are we about to declare that the houseman training be simplified in order that there will be no perceived hardship on house officers and that they will be allowed reduced hours, to see fewer patients and to assist in fewer procedures?” he asked.

Dr Koh said the competency of such doctors would be under question if housemanship training did not prepare them for the reality of being a medical practitioner with long hours of work.

“What will happen if these housemen move on to be medical doctors? “Will they then be able to manage patients on their own with long hours of work when there is a never-ending queue of patients needing their care that they never prepared for?” he told a press conference yesterday.

Last Friday, the Health Ministry announced that it was setting up an independent task force to investigate the death of a trainee doctor and allegations of bullying at government facilities.

This came after the media reported that a trainee doctor who was stationed at Hospital Penang died after falling from a building on April 17.

Some doctors and former housemen shared their own experience on workplace bullying on social media.

Dr Koh attributed the increase in these cases to the higher number of medical graduates, to the point where doctors may not recognise every houseman they are training.

He noted the Health Ministry had set up a system where trainee doctors can bring up grouses and complaints but acknowledged there was “a culture of fear” of being reprimanded.

“Recognising the fact that cases of bullying may never be reported for fear of being singled out or punished, we provided a helpline called HelpDoc which had received over 120 complaints including 36 involving bullying,” he said.

He added the fear of being reprimanded is not limited to house officers but medical officers and consultants as well.

He said MMA was having regular dialogues with the Health Ministry to address this issue.

Dr Koh also said help was readily available as there were specific units at hospitals with trained counsellors and psychiatrists.

“Stress management for doctors is available in hospitals, we have a unit with counsellors and psychiatrists where they can go if they have issues,” he said.