

MMA president says Malaysia losing its nurses to overseas offers, urges govt to improve welfare to reclaim brain drain



Dr Azizan claimed workplace pressure and low wages to be among the factors behind the increasing nurse vacancies in Malaysian public health facilities. — Bernama pic

By John Bunyan

Monday, 15 Apr 2024 10:48 AM MYT

KUALA LUMPUR, April 15 — Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Azizan Abdul Aziz has affirmed a continued outflow of government nurses abroad in the last four years since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

She claimed many left their jobs at the Health Ministry in pursuit of higher paying work, better incentives and less pressure offered by countries like in neighbouring Singapore, Australia and West Asia, *Utusan Malaysia* reported today.

“Many have gone to work in Singapore, Australia and West Asia. A new U29 grade public healthcare nurse in Malaysia earns a monthly starting salary of around RM1,800 while a new graduate nurse in Singapore can earn almost five times that amount.

“Low pay in public healthcare is one of the main reasons nurses are looking for greener pastures’ in private healthcare and abroad,” she was quoted as saying.

Dr Azizan claimed workplace pressure and low wages to be among the factors behind the increasing nurse vacancies in Malaysian public health facilities.

“The nurses may also be ‘burnt out’ as they always work too much,” she was quoted as saying.

According to *Utusan Malaysia*, vacancies for government nurses have gone up between 10 and 40 per cent in the last four years.

The Health Ministry told Parliament last month that vacancies for nurses stood at 2,106 in 2020, increasing to 2,224 in 2021 and 4,420 in 2022; and the latest figure as of last year was 6,896.

Dr Azizan said that the government needs to focus on the welfare of all health workers, including nurses, to ensure that the quality of the health sector can be improved to accommodate the increase in patient attendance at government clinics and hospitals on a daily basis.

She added that incentives and salaries for nurses need to be improved and reviewed by taking into account their responsibilities as the main pillar of the public health sector in this country.

“Nurses’ salaries need to be increased significantly along with any allowances they are entitled to, as part of efforts to retain nurses serving in our public health care system.

“Maybe they won’t be able to compete with the salary package offered by the private sectors, but steps can be taken to improve the work-life balance of nurses.

“MMA believes that most Malaysian nurses would prefer to stay in Malaysia if given the choice, but may have little choice if they are struggling to make ends meet,” she was quoted as saying.

But Malaysia’s shortage of nurses is not only in the public healthcare sector as the daily reported the Association of Private Hospitals Malaysia saying the private sector will need about 9,224 additional nurses between 2023 and 2025.