

MMA proposes rotation system to ensure doctors serve in rural areas

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Dr Koh pointed out there had been a discrepancy in the number of doctors in the peninsula and East Malaysia. — AFP photo

KUCHING (June 29): Doctors must be prepared to serve in rural areas especially in Sabah and Sarawak, said Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Koh Kar Chai.

He suggested this could be done on a rotation basis, whereby doctors who have served in Sabah and Sarawak for a certain period of time need not wait for replacements before they are allowed to be posted back to the peninsula.

In an interview with Free Malaysia Today, Dr Koh said MMA stands with the decision that postings should be aimed at filling up posts in the government service and where they are most needed.

He pointed out there had been a discrepancy in the number of doctors in the peninsula and East Malaysia.

“We agree that there is a shortage and this is because many still refuse to serve in rural areas.

“To overcome this, there should be a rotation system where everyone gets to serve in the rural areas.

“Incentives should be given to those going to the rural areas but the infrastructure needs to be improved. The whole posting system needs a revamp,” he said.

On whether doctors should consider serving in remote areas as a form of national service, Dr Koh said it should not be the case.

“There is not a day in the life of doctors at work when they are not serving the nation. Healthcare services should be equal, whether in the city or rural areas.

“In fact, some have commented that serving in rural areas has improved their skills compared to working in hospitals that are too crowded,” he said.

On those who appeal after being given postings to East Malaysia, Dr Koh said such requests should be granted for those who are married, particularly couples with children.

He said there must be a work-life balance failing which the mental health of doctors would deteriorate.

“How can we expect them to be happy at work when they are miles apart from their loved ones? Incentives should be provided and extended to families as well.

“The process of transfers must accommodate the couples if they are in government service. This should also be sped up as it sometimes takes up to one year to be approved,” he said.

According to the report, the Public Service Commission and Ministry of Health (MoH) are understood to be in the final stretch of completing the interviews for about 6,000 contract doctors who have applied to be absorbed into permanent government service.

Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin announced in February that 4,186 healthcare workers on contract would be absorbed into the ministry in permanent posts from June.

He said the number involved 3,586 medical officers, 300 dentists, and 300 pharmacists.