

MMA wants special sitting to debate changes to Infectious Diseases Act

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The Malaysian Medical Association wants the amendments to stress more on ethics instead of the imposition of hefty penalties. (Bernama pic)

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has proposed a special parliamentary sitting to table amendments to the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 (Act 342).

Its president, Dr Koh Kar Chai, said this was necessary for the changes to be discussed in detail.

He said while the amendments to the Act were necessary, they should not be rushed, as it indicates a lack of engagement with all stakeholders concerned.

“While urgency is needed in passing these amendments, clarity and clear guidelines on the implementation should be insisted upon.

“There is worry among stakeholders over the implementation and enforcement, as valid questions are being asked by experts and the general public.

“MPs, who are the representatives of the people, should not be pressured by any deadline to pass the amendments without important details being provided,” he said in a statement today.

Koh said a special parliamentary sitting must be held because the amendments to Act 342 would impact all levels of society, the country’s economy as well as healthcare services.

“The Act is intended to assist in the control and prevention of infectious diseases. Therefore, ethics should be stressed upon. Instead, what we are seeing is more emphasis on penalties.

“It is unclear how the new amendments to the Act on the notification process as well as penalties to be imposed for failure to adhere to this process will affect healthcare practitioners.”

The amendments are expected to include hefty increases in penalties for not complying with Covid-19 SOPs; more specific compound rates for individuals and corporate bodies; provide enforcement powers to authorities other than those from the health ministry; the use of tracking devices; and isolate positive cases in places other than quarantine stations.

Koh said giving powers to officers from other enforcement agencies would relieve the burden on health ministry officers, but it would also confuse the public and lead to inappropriate enforcement, as seen in the initial phase of the pandemic.

"As far as individuals and small businesses are concerned, further education and awareness campaigns need to be carried out on the need for adherence to SOPs.

"However, of utmost importance is the need to ensure there are no double standards in the enforcement of this Act.

"Otherwise, its implementation will fail," he added.

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