

# MORE DOCTORS TO BOLSTER HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

## STARPICKS

Tuesday, 15 Feb 2022



The government's announcement that permanent positions will be created is welcome news for contract doctors.

KUALA LUMPUR: The government's move to create more permanent positions for contract doctors will strengthen the nation's healthcare system.

In welcoming the government's announcement on the matter, Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Koh Kar Chai said: "After years of uncertainty, we are finally seeing light at the end of the tunnel towards resolving the longstanding issue of medical officers serving in government healthcare facilities on a contract basis."

“We remain hopeful of more positions opening up each year. There are currently more than 20,000 contract doctors with more additions each year. If not managed correctly, this will remain a perpetual issue and stifle the growth of our health sector,” said Dr Koh, who expressed gratitude on behalf of the Gerakan Hartal Doktor Kontrak, Islamic Medical Association of Malaysia (IMAM) and Malaysian Medics International (MMI).



'There are currently more than 20,000 contract doctors with more additions each year,' said Dr Koh.

Last Thursday, Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin announced that 3,586 permanent positions for medical doctors will be created in 2022, with 1,500 additional permanent posts for medical officers, dental officers and pharmacists to be opened up annually from 2023 to 2025.

“We need more experts, doctors, and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob also supports the MOH’s recommendation and has approved this application, including the additional allocation given by the Ministry of Finance,” said Khairy in a Bernama report.

He also assured that the government would be looking into promotions for Grade UD47 doctors, increase 800 permanent positions for specialists, while 70 dentist positions will be offered from 2023.

Dr Koh said: “This is timely as the demand for specialist care is high and even more so when Malaysia reaches ageing nation status in 2030. There is currently a shortage of specialists in almost all specialisations. Hopefully, more specialist positions will be added on towards the target of having more than 18,000 specialists in the country by 2025.

“The selection criteria which are yet to be spelled out in detail need to be transparent, with an appeal process in place for those not given a permanent position. We strongly believe that with the comprehensive and

inclusive approach towards this issue, we can get there sooner than expected.”

Past MMA president Datuk Dr N.G. Baskaran concurred that it was a step in the right direction by the government.

“Given how these young doctors have put in their service during the Covid-19 pandemic, the announcement serves as a recognition and reward for all their hard work and dedication.

“While creating a few thousand new positions will not resolve the issue of contract doctors as there is a lot more that needs to be done, this is good news for the health sector and the country’s future. We are thankful to Khairy Jamaluddin for initiating this in the short time that he has held the Health Minister portfolio.

“We still need to strengthen our healthcare system. The additional allocation for specialists will make it easier for doctors to pursue specialisation,” said Dr Baskaran.

Dr Kirubane Rajendran, 29, a Grade UG41 dental officer in Terengganu, said she is happy for her colleagues who did not get a chance to be absorbed into government service but had their contracts extended instead.

Dr Kirubane who obtained her dentistry degree from Sri Ramachandra University in Chennai, India, and was on contract until November 2020, said: “The only thing on my mind when I was on contract was to always do my best and learn all I could in terms of treatments. Getting a permanent position is what we all wish for, but we also had to have a back up plan.

“If contract doctors have financial support from their family, then they have the option of furthering their studies abroad. But not everyone is so lucky. I was once in that (contract) position and it kills the spirit to work so hard, yet not get a permanent posting,” she added.

A 27-year-old medical officer who wished to be known as just Dr Sharifah said the promise of permanent posts and contract officers now eligible to apply for specialisation programmes brought a ray of hope to the end of a five-year struggle.

“During the pandemic, medical staff were pushed to the limit. We shared the same patient load as our permanent colleagues and worked the same long hours,” said Dr Sharifah who graduated from MAHSA University and is currently on her second contract.

As one of the first batches of doctors in 2017 to be offered one-year compulsory contract service, 29-year-old medical officer Dr Lim as she wished to be known said they were informed very early on that chances for permanent service would be low as there were not enough positions available.

“We already knew that competition would be stiff. We were treated differently from our seniors and in hindsight, there should be more transparency in how permanent officers are chosen,” said Dr Lim who holds a permanent posting in Perak now.

“I’m glad that the government is doing something. All contract docs should be given a fair chance to be offered permanent positions. We have seen many with great potential who resigned due to burnout or saw no future in government service.”