

Outcry over higher medical bills at private clinics

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PETALING JAYA: Patients are having to fork out more for medical treatment at private clinics, no thanks to the current shortage of medicines in Malaysia.

theSun was earlier alerted by patients that their medical bills were surprisingly higher compared with last year.

IT specialist Jonathan Toh said what used to cost him RM75 to RM80 now costs more than RM100.

"Recently, I went to see a doctor twice for my skin allergy. The first visit cost me RM120, while the second cost RM160," he said.

Toh claimed it was the same medication he was given earlier, the difference was that the cream was in a bigger container.

"Last week, my wife went to see a doctor at a different clinic as she had the flu. She was charged RM120."

Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Koh Kar Chai said consultation costs at general practice (GP) clinics and specialist clinics are governed by the Private Healthcare Facilities and Services Act 1998.

"To be fair to doctors, consultation fees have not been reviewed since the Act came into place."

Koh said healthcare costs in hospitals are generally divided between hospital charges that are largely unregulated, and specialist doctors' charges, which are regulated.

"The treatment cost at a GP clinic is generally bundled together with the cost of medicines. The cost of medication has been rising steadily throughout the years," he said.

"It's a wonder how many GP clinics are still able to maintain their charges, albiet with an occasional increase due to hike in medicine prices, despite facing rising operational costs such as rental of premises, electricity bills and the recent hike in minimum salary to RM1,500."

Koh said the current disruption in medicine supply does not help either. If a patient thinks that a clinic is overcharging, he can request for an explanation or an itemised bill.

He added that a review of the current healthcare system needs to be carried out to allow reduced out-of-pocket payment for medical treatment.

“We wait with bated breath on the White Paper on health, which the health minister has been working on, to see which direction our healthcare system will go,” he said.

Private GP Dr Wan Hidayu Wan Ahmad said her clinic is venturing into additional services to survive the price hike.

“I want to provide my patients with the best affordable medical care, but to sustain my clinic, I have to venture into aesthetics as well,” she said.

Wan Hidayu added that her clinic has maintained consultation fees at RM15 and kept medical bills for each patient at between RM30 and RM60, depending on their prognosis.

“We try to keep the price low in the GP part of our clinic, but we have increased the price in our aesthetics clinic. Our patients are fine with our decision and continue to support our aesthetics clinic while returning for GP consultations as well,” she said.