

‘Revision of medical charges needed to support system’

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PETALING JAYA: The review of public healthcare fees is timely and necessary to sustain the healthcare system, say those in the healthcare industry.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Koh Kar Chai said such a review is long overdue and will add to the funds needed for healthcare spending, though the increase is likely to be minimal.

He said an added bonus will be the realisation that there is value in the healthcare services being provided by the government, instead of being almost free, which many may equate to the services rendered being low in value.

“There shouldn’t be any opposition to this as those who can’t afford the registration fees will not be turned away.

“Ideally, a social health insurance scheme should be high on the agenda of the White Paper on Healthcare Reforms.

“It is time to move away from the current heavily subsidised healthcare system, which is unsustainable,” he said.

Dr Koh explained that as far as healthcare funding is concerned, emphasis has been placed to ensure that those in low income groups can still have access to heavily subsidised healthcare services.

He added that the current quantum is too miniscule to have a noticeable impact on the health ministry’s expenses, and even when fees at some of the other government departments had seen an increase over the years, registration fees for public healthcare had remained the same.

In a written parliament reply on July 19, Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin said Malaysia’s public healthcare system, which charges RM1 and RM5 for outpatient and specialist care respectively in its facilities, is unsustainable.

Malaysian Pharmacists Society president Amrahi Buang said the review on registration fees should be done to increase the degree of medical adherence.

Medication adherence usually refers to whether patients take their prescribed medications as specified by their doctors (whether twice daily, and so on, and in the correct dosage).

Amrahi said if treatments and medicines are dispensed through a “co-payment” system, more patients are likely to adhere to treatments and medication regimes, rather than treat their packet of (free) medicine lightly.

“We want the commitment of the public to take their medications because there are cases of people not committed to taking their medicine, throwing them away, or even worse, selling them – and we have caught such perpetrators.

“The co-payment system will only collect about 10% to 20% of the total cost,” he said, adding that the Health Minister’s White Paper on Healthcare will avoid health issues from being politicised and will present a sustainable approach that will hopefully be bipartisan.

“Ever since Merdeka, health issues have been politicised, and that’s why we provide free medical treatments.

“The current concept that we’re using is a segregation of public and private healthcare, where taxpayers – even millionaires – will be paying for medical services if they opt to receive treatment from public hospitals.

“We hope these issues will be solved through the White Paper,” he said.