

Rotate doctors serving in rural areas, says MMA

K. Parkaran

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MMA president Dr Koh Kar Chai says the posting system for new doctors needs a revamp. (Facebook pic)

PETALING JAYA: Doctors must be prepared to serve in rural areas, especially in Sabah and Sarawak, but it should be done on a rotation basis, says the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA).

Its president, Dr Koh Kar Chai, 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 said that with the rotation system, 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.

"We agree that there is a shortage and this is because many still refuse to serve in rural areas," he told FMT.



Dr Koh Kar Chai.

"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 there had been a discrepancy in the number of doctors in the peninsula and East Malaysia.

Koh was commenting on a report in FMT last week that contract doctors being interviewed for appointment as permanent medical officers were being asked a common question: whether they are prepared to serve in the rural areas of Sabah and Sarawak if selected.

Some of them were told that their answers will go on record to avoid successful candidates from appealing after they are offered the posts, something that had happened often in the past.

Asked if these doctors should consider serving in remote areas as a form of national service, 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, Koh said such requests should be granted to 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.

It is understood that the Public Service Commission and health ministry are in the final stretch of completing the interviews for about 6,000 contract doctors who have applied to be absorbed into permanent government service.

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

He said the number would be made up of 3,586 medical officers, 300 dentists and 300 pharmacists.

In 2020, then health minister Dr Adham Baba said it did not list work in the interior or rural areas as a criterion for government doctors, dentists and pharmacists to be considered for permanent posts.