

A Word from the President

Firstly, I wish to congratulate President Elect Dr Koh Kar Chai and all recently elected office bearers at our first ever virtual AGM. Also, thanks to the team who worked hard to ensure everything went smoothly.

My deepest appreciation to Immediate Past President Dr N. Ganabaskaran for his wisdom and guidance in helping me settle in as President of MMA. I also wish to thank him for getting the wheel moving to face the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I wish to also congratulate SCHOMOS Chairman Dr Vijay and the SCHOMOS team and HGS Dr Thirunavukarasu Rajoo; and all involved in organising the virtual session held in conjunction with Doctors' Day on 10 October. We were honoured to have YB Dato' Sri Dr Adham bin Baba (Minister of Health), YBhg Datuk Dr Hj Rohaizat bin Hj Yon (Deputy Director General of Health (Medical)), YBhg Dato' Dr Norhizan bin Ismail and Dr Norhayati Nordin (Consultant Psychiatrist, Hospital Kuala Lumpur) deliver a special message to doctors in the country.

I wish to take this opportunity to once again salute all doctors and frontliners who have been working day and night battling COVID-19. My highest respect and deepest appreciation for your sacrifice and service for the nation.

The month of October was indeed a challenging month for all, especially our front- and backliners who are again faced with the task of flattening the curve as the third wave of COVID-19 hits the nation, no thanks to a state election held in Sabah that contributed to the spike in cases.

Although some may argue that cases started to spike before the elections, we believe the mass gatherings held during the state election's campaigning had largely contributed to the widespread number of cases in Sabah.

MMA had warned on a number of occasions, that if SOP compliance was low during an election, cases could easily spread throughout the state. The state had a few active clusters to begin with before the campaigning began.



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At the time of writing, Sabah's public healthcare is being overwhelmed by the increasing number of COVID-19 cases. In mid-October, up to 800 COVID-19 cases were being reported daily nationwide, with the majority coming from Sabah. MMA had called for emergency funds to be released by the federal government to help manage the COVID-19 situation there while our Sabah branch, together with the Malaysian Medical Association Foundation, had launched a COVID-19 Fund for Sabah as the healthcare needs of the state were rapidly increasing.

I am particularly concerned that the nine public hospitals in Sabah may soon reach a critical point as more cases of COVID-19 are confirmed from the backlog of test results. The following weeks will be crucial for the health and economy of the poorest state in the country. I appeal to all members to do all they can in their capacity to help our colleagues in Sabah.

It is also time for Malaysians to unite. For once, I hope politics in the land will be swept aside for a state in dire need of help.

While urgent attention is now focused on bringing the pandemic under control, the standard

of healthcare for urgent non-COVID-19 cases must also be maintained. I am of the view that it is timely for MOH to rethink healthcare, taking into consideration the threat of a pandemic.

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The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to be around for another 1-2 years, and we still have a long way to go for a safe, proven vaccine to be found. MOH must start looking at the bigger picture in ensuring public healthcare resilience. There may be a need to redesign healthcare to be pandemic-ready.

The pandemic has also shown a greater urgency for the need of an expansion in healthcare services with investments in personnel and infrastructure. MMA will continue to push for permanent positions for our contract medical officers and longer terms of service to

allow for specialisation. We will also continue to engage with the ministry on the need for greater emphasis on primary care and for more effective management of NCDs through engagement with GPs.

The pandemic has also forced many of us to adapt quickly to the use of digital technology in the virtual management of some of our patients. The healthcare landscape is fast evolving and very soon we may see even wider use of telemedicine in our practice. This cannot be ignored and we will all have to adapt to this change at some point.

At the time of writing, the media have also asked for MMA's wish list for Budget 2021. Rest assured that we will take the opportunity to highlight our many concerns for our nation's healthcare. Among them are the hardships experienced by our GPs as the loan moratorium comes to an end.

The government of the day has seen the toll a pandemic places on our nation's healthcare system and how health is paramount to keep an economy going. It is high time that they take our concerns more seriously. **BMM**