750 permanent medical officer positions aren't adequate for Sabah, MMA suggests more initiatives to MOH

By Pragalath K



IN an effort to arrest acute doctor shortages in Sabah, the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) stressed that recruitment by the Health Ministry alone would not be sufficient. Health Ministry (MOH) announced that 750 permanent medical officer positions will be filled in Sabah and Sarawak in February 2027.

MMA president Dr L. Sivanaesan raised concerns over the matter since 67% of replacement medical officers from outside of Sabah failed to report for duty in a recent permanent appointment exercise.

To make matters worse Hospital Ranau lost 11 out of 19 medical officers. The hospital is currently operating with only none medical officers, including the hospital director.



Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president *Dr L. Sivanaesan*

He questioned MOH as to how it allowed the hospital to lose more than half of its medical officers.

Questions were also raised on contingency measures to ensure the hospital can continue caring patients. Workforce planning are also key aspects in this issue.

He further pointed out that the 750 permanent medical officer positions may meet similar predicament with the previous one since many may not turn up for duty. Another problem with MOH's announcement is that the positions would not resolve the acute shortage faced by Sabah now.

The MOH was called upon to implement four immediate measures to rectify the shortage. First restore sufficient doctors all the understaffed hospitals including temporary support from Peninsula if need be. In filling up the shortage MMA reminded MOH to ensure safe working hours and adequate rest for the doctors while they prioritise patient care.

The second measure is to coordinate transfer and appointment exercises with confirmed replacement arrivals supported by service-impact assessments and contingency staffing plans. This is vital to prevent staffing disruptions.

Third is a comprehensive recruitment and retention package that includes competitive remuneration, improved Regional Incentive Payment (Bayaran Insentif Wilayah, BIW) and appropriate hardship allowances, upfront relocation assistance, suitable accommodation, predictable posting and transfer arrangements, and clear opportunities for specialist training and career advancement. Service in underserved areas should receive meaningful recognition.

The last measure MMA called for is transparency and accountability. For this MOH must publish actual staffing numbers, vacancies, replacement reporting rates and progress in restoring services, particularly in facilities facing critical shortages. Minimum safe staffing requirements must be established, with immediate intervention when these cannot be met.

MMA's third measure had been raised by Senator Dr A. Lingeshwaran during the Dewan Negara session.

The ministry was also reminded that its success in providing healthcare in Sabah depended on how many doctors report for duty, remain in service and are available to care for patients. — Nov 1, 2026