The Star

'Dr' title not a licence to practise medicine, says MMA

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PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) cautioned that using the title "Dr" must not mislead the public into thinking a person is legally qualified to practise medicine.

Its president Datuk Dr Thirunavukarasu Rajoo said the association was concerned that misusing medical titles could undermine public trust and put patient safety at risk, particularly when health-related information is widely shared online.

"While the academic title 'Dr' may be used by individuals who have completed a medical degree, this does not give them the right to practise medicine or mean they are registered with the Malaysian Medical Council (MMC)," he said in a statement Monday (Dec 29).

The association noted the MMC's recent clarification that not all medical graduates are allowed to practise, even if they hold a medical degree.

Dr Thirunavukarasu said that under Section 33 of the Medical Act 1971, it is an offence for anyone who is not registered or exempted to use titles or descriptions that could mislead the public into believing they are authorised to practise medicine or surgery.

"In simpler terms, the issue is not the title itself, but the context in which it is used," he said.

He added that problems arise when unregistered individuals use the title "Dr" in medical or health-related settings, whether in person or online, particularly when giving health advice, endorsements or treatment.

"This creates a real risk of the public being misled into believing that these individuals are legally registered doctors. Such unlawful actions can potentially cause harm," he said.

The MMA also echoed the MMC's advise for the public to verify a doctor's registration status through the council's official website.

"The public has the right to report to the relevant authorities those who provide healthcare opinions, advice or services without being registered and licensed to practise in Malaysia," Dr Thirunavukarasu said.

He urged medical graduates, media practitioners, product promoters and digital content creators to exercise responsibility, transparency and ethical judgement when using professional titles in health-related contexts.

"MMA will continue to work closely with all stakeholders, including the MMC, to uphold the integrity of the profession and protect public confidence in the medical system," he added.

The MMC clarified that using the title "Dr" does not grant the right to practise medicine in Malaysia; registration with the council and a valid Annual Practising Certificate (APC) are required.

MMC president Datuk Dr Mahathar Abd Wahab said individuals who have completed recognised medical degree programmes may use the title as an academic designation, but this does not mean they are registered medical practitioners.

He added that the title "Dr" is not exclusive to doctors, and is also used by dentists, veterinarians and holders of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees.