

Government studying plan to overcome shortage

Foreign doctors could be the answer

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SUBANG JAYA, Fri. — The Government is considering allowing foreign doctors to practise in private hospitals and clinics to overcome the shortage of doctors in the country, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

However, adequate conditions would be imposed to protect local doctors and patients, Dr Mahathir said.

Currently, foreign doctors are not permitted to practise in private hospitals but are allowed to practise in Government hospitals upon registering with the Malaysian Medical Council (MMC).

They might even be allowed to set up clinics in the country, Dr Mahathir said, adding that details would be worked out in a study to be made on the matter.

Dr Mahathir gave this hint when he was speaking to reporters after opening the second Obstetrics and Gynaecology congress here.

Also present at the function were Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Health Minister Datuk Lee Kim Sai and president of the Obstetrics and Gynaecology

Association Dr V. Sivanesaratnam.

The Prime Minister said the Government might consider allowing doctors from Asean, Asia and even Europe to be included in the programme if the proposal was implemented.

The proposed move could help reduce the high fees charged by private medical institutions. High fees had resulted in the majority of patients seeking treatment from Government hospitals.

"The shortage of doctors in the country has resulted in fewer private hospitals and clinics which sometimes charge high fees. This had resulted in more patients turning up at Government hospitals for treatment.

"On the other hand Government hospitals are continuously losing doctors because private hospitals offer higher pay.

"We have been trying to increase the number of doctors in Government clinics and also increase their pay. We have a constraint on pay increases. If we only raise the doctors' pay and not the

others, it brings about problems. Thus, we cannot compete with the private sector."

Dr Mahathir said that if the Government could increase the number of doctors by allowing foreigners to practise in the private sector, there would be less attraction for Government doctors to leave.

Both Government and private hospitals could then play their roles in providing medical treatment to the people, he said.

Earlier in his speech, the Prime Minister said a review of the Government's policy on foreign doctors was necessary to help ease the shortage of local doctors and reduce the exorbitant fees charged by private clinics now.

He said the existing policy had contributed to lucrative incomes for private doctors while the attractive remunerations for private doctors had hampered the Government's efforts to retain

PLEASE TURN TO
PAGE 2 COL 1

PM: We need quality health care system

1ST 0 0 JUN 1991

FROM PAGE ONE
doctors in the public service.

Dr Mahathir also said that the Government was trying to set up well-equipped obstetric and gynaecology units in all hospitals.

However, building big and well-equipped hospitals was not the answer to improve better health care for women or to reduce the mortality rate, he said.

"What we need is a solid and quality basic health care system for mothers and infants, health education for women and special care for them.

"More importantly, a health care and treatment system that we provide must be acceptable to the community," he said.

Director-General of Health Tan Sri Abdullah

Abdul Rahman said currently his Ministry had 50 foreign doctors under its employment — most of them from Burma, India and Pakistan.

He would discuss the proposal to allow foreign doctors to work in private hospitals with the MMC at its next meeting.

"I will also get feedback from the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) on the issue," he said in his address.

MMA president Dr Pius Martin said his executive council would discuss the issue at its meeting tomorrow before issuing a statement.

About 300 experts in Obstetrics and Gynaecology (O & G) and suppliers of medical equipment are taking part in the three-day congress.