

THINK SERVICE, NOT JUST PROFITS

By LEE KAR YEAN

KUALA LUMPUR: Private hospitals and doctors must balance their commercial goals with their social responsibility.

Then and then only will they be regarded with respect by the community and the nation, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He said there was a possibility that private doctors were becoming too business-oriented and more interested in profit than giving their service under the Hippocratic oath.

(The oath serves as a guide on the ethics of the medical profes-

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PM: Private docs must not forget social role

sion.)

As a result, he said, the fees imposed by these doctors were often astronomical and many poor patients were turned away.

"The medical profession should not become too business-oriented. The service element should always be emphasised.

"Although income is important, private hospitals should also be considerate and have a sense of social responsibility," he said at the opening of the National Healthcare Conference jointly organised by the Association of Private Hospitals of Malaysia and the Health

Ministry.

Dr Mahathir said the practice of refusing to treat an "emergency" patient who could not pay any deposit was incompatible with the medical profession.

He said the patient should at least be given "emergency treatment," much like "first aid," although this may reduce the doctor's income by a bit.

"Even now, the income of private medical specialists are four or five times more than their counterparts in the civil service.

"I believe this slight reduction in income would not pose any huge

problems," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government encouraged the establishment of private hospitals because it would help ease its financial burden and meet the demand of the increasingly health-conscious population.

He hoped the expertise of private doctors would also increase to be on par with those of the world because if their services were recognised, patients from other parts of the world would flock to Malaysia for treatment.

This in turn, would contribute to the country's economy and make

Malaysia and its medical expertise more well known.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said if patients felt the fees imposed by the private doctors were too high they could always go to government hospitals for treatment.

"If they choose to go to private hospitals they should be prepared to pay," he said.

On the National Heart Institute, Dr Mahathir said it would eventually be privatised to keep the salaries of the heart specialists competitive.

He also said the recruitment of foreign doctors would continue to overcome the shortage in the country.

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Mustapha need not quit

state assembly

Newly appointed Minister of Sabah Affairs Tun Datu Mustapha Datu Harun does not have to step down as a state assemblyman to become a Cabinet minister, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.