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MMA all for lowering hospital charges

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Malaysian Medical Association today endorsed the call by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for private hospitals to reduce their fees.

Its president, Dr Milton Lum, said investors in private hospitals should view their investment from a long-term perspective and not expect quick returns.

"They should not expect returns within the first few years of their investment."

Dr Lum said there was no actual control over private hospital charges. As most private hospitals today were owned by corporate bodies, doctors had a limited say in the hospital charges.

He, however, gave the association's assurance that specialists receiving professional fees and not salaried at private hospitals would exercise discretion in charging the fees.

Dr Lum said there was an urgent need for private hospitals to review their salary structure.

Meanwhile, Subang Jaya Medical Centre director Kevin Potter has urged the Government not to regulate the fees charged by private hospitals but allow market forces to determine the rates. He said with increased competition, charges would be kept down if the hospitals wanted to remain competitive.

He said as the number of new private hospitals being established was on the rise, there would be stiffer competition especially in outpatient care.

Potter was commenting on Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng's announcement on the Private Healthcare Facilities and Services Bill 1998 to be tabled in Parliament in March.

In agreeing with the proposal for private hospitals to be licensed, Potter said that was SJMC's aim and that it had achieved ISO 9002 accreditation.

The SJMC is the first private hospital to be awarded the certificate. The ceremony was officiated by Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Deputy Minister Datuk S. Subramaniam.

Potter said SJMC had a medical advisory board involved in assessing credentials of physicians, ethics of medical practice and handling customer complaints.

He said for the fiscal year beginning June, SJMC had allocated about 25 per cent of its pre-tax profits in providing "no frills bed" programmes for the less fortunate.

Potter said there had been flow of in-patients and out-patients to government hospitals due to the economic crunch.

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