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Trim charges, Dr M urges private hospitals

Kamarul Yunus

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, while calling for a pay cut among specialists in private hospitals, hopes they will also offer lower charges to local patients in view of the current economic problem.

"They should offer a discount to local patients whose income have dipped by 45 per cent (due to the currency problem)," he said at the opening of Gleneagles Intan Medical Centre (GIMC) in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

On the converse, Dr Mahathir said private hospitals can afford to charge a higher rate to foreigners because these patients are able to pay such a rate simply because the ringgit is now cheaper.

He reminded private medical and health practitioners that hospitals are dependent on the health status of the people.

"If the people in the country are all healthy, there will be no need for hospitals. So you (private hospitals) depend on the natural misfortune of others.

"But I am sure private hospitals are dealing with services which are much needed, and as such, they should have a vision for caring for those who are not able to afford the treatment at their hospitals.

"I don't know how you are going to work that out but I am sure you do have a scheme to help the less fortunate.

"Otherwise, they have to go to government hospitals," he said, adding that public hospitals are now facing increased pressure as a result of the ringgit depreciation which leads to more people turning to them for treatment rather than going to the private ones.

Thus, he said, private hospitals should try to encourage patients to go to their hospitals by offering not only attractive services and facilities but also charges. "If you don't get patients, I am sure you will also suffer," he added.

To keep down the cost of treatment at private hospitals, Dr Mahathir also suggested a pay cut among their specialists.

"I would like to suggest, if I may with due apology, that we all take a salary cut. We have to bring down the cost so that the charges for your patients, especially the poorer ones, will be less.

"I am sure that the salary cut will not cause us to starve to death," he said, adding that Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had even imposed a 10 per cent salary cut on his (Dr Mahathir's) salary.

Acknowledging that many company executives have taken a pay cut in their salaries in response to the call by the Government, Dr Mahathir said such a move is part of their contribution to the well-being of the people and the speedy recovery of the country's economy.

"I am glad to be told that since my nasty comments that executives should take a pay cut, many of them have already done so.

"How much I don't know, but I am sure that Gleneagles Intan too will also like to contribute to the well-being of the country and the speedy economic recovery of the country," he added.

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