

Ministry to brief PM on proposal

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PUTRAJAYA: The Health Ministry will brief the Prime Minister "very soon" on the mechanics behind the National Health Fund – a proposal in line with a medical insurance scheme to help ease the financial burden of the Government.

Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said the proposal for the fund was put together by the Economic Planning Unit after many years of study with comparative models in developed countries.

"The ministry has had extensive discussions with practitioners and other stakeholders in the country's medical sector on the proposal. This is important in order to ensure that the fund will gain wide acceptance.

"We have done many studies on such a scheme in the past stretching back to the 1980s but so far, nothing final has been approved by the Government.

"We will brief the Prime Minister very soon on our proposal and then we will leave it to his wisdom to decide," he said after a press conference to announce Malaysia's success in spinal disc replacement surgery at the Putrajaya Hospital here yesterday.

However, Chua declined to give details of the fund.

He was commenting on a statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that a national health insurance scheme for all Malaysians was in the offing

as the cost of providing free or minimal cost medical treatment was becoming too much for the Government to bear.

This was because the price and cost of treatment had increased drastically over the years.

Chua said the existence of such a fund had become necessary now that Malaysians were living longer and thus, required more urgent healthcare especially in the later years.

The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP), however, recommended that the Government corporatise the public sector health system and increase its standard fees instead of implementing the scheme.

Its president S.M. Mohamed Idris said this would make national healthcare viable, efficient and effective.

He said that while the country's health system was among the most affordable and accessible in the world, CAP was concerned over two negative effects if there was a national insurance scheme.

The effects were that healthcare costs would rise significantly and basic healthcare would be inaccessible to many Malaysians.

"Health insurance will only be available to those who can afford to pay, are informed of the necessity to pay or whose employers pay for them," he said.

He said while the idea for a scheme was first mooted in 1997, the public had not been fully informed of the details.