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Grace period for college

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SUNGAI BULOH, Thurs. - The Cabinet yesterday gave Malacca Manipal Medical College three years to overcome weaknesses in its medical programme and strictly comply with recommendations of the Malaysian Medical Council.

Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said the Cabinet had also directed the college to change its duration of medical programme from the Indian system of four-and-a-half years to five years as required by the Malaysian Government.

"I have spoken to the college owners and they have agreed to comply with the Cabinet directive," he said after opening the RM30.4 million National Public Health Laboratory here today.

When the issue was raised yesterday, Chua said the Cabinet agreed that accreditation be extended to three years to allow the college to adhere to the council's recommendations.

"This is to avert problems in future. The college also assured me that it would advise students to complete five years as directed by the Cabinet," he added.

At present, the college follows the Indian system practised by its parent college, Kasturba Medical College in Manipal, recognised under the Malaysian Medical Act.

Chua said students who followed the Indian system tend to lose out compared to their peers who did their five-year course here.

The students do two-and-a-half years of studies in Manipal and another two years in Malacca, after which they have to do a year's internship before registering for another one year of housemanship.

Chua said those who completed five years went straight for housemanship.

The Cabinet yesterday also decided that in the case of Malacca Manipal Medical College students, hospitals should not evaluate an internship, a pre-requisite for registration to practise under the Medical Act.

It was also decided that if at the end of the internship, the supervising specialists felt the student lacked clinical skills, the internship would be extended to another two months before the person registers for housemanship.

The two-month internship is done either at Malacca or Muar hospital.

Chua said the first batch of students from the college had already graduated, done their internship and housemanship while the second batch was into their internship.

"The third batch of medical students will be asked to do the five years so that they can go straight into housemanship," he added.

Chua also pointed out that the assessment presently done at the end of the internship was clinical based, not based on written examination as alleged by some people.

"I must stress that the government and council want to ensure that right standards are set for medical colleges and they produce quality graduates." He said the problems relating to the Malacca Manipal Medical College was brought to the attention of the council earlier and proactive measures were taken to rectify the problems and weaknesses.

"The council went to the college to ascertain the merits of accrediting the degree and found weaknesses in the system and gave the college one year to correct all the weaknesses, including course structure and clinical exposure during internship."

Chua said henceforth, the five-year compulsory medical course must be

strictly adhered to by all public and private medical institutions to avoid problems.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had asked Chua to settle the plight faced by students from the college following new conditions set by the council for the recognition of its degrees.

Some 1,227 students from the college are in a dilemma after the council imposed new conditions for the recognition of the degree courses they are pursuing.