

Pharmacy Bill 'no debate' rule give docs migraine

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Medical associations in the country are disappointed with the outcome of the latest meeting yesterday between them and the Health Ministry's Pharmaceutical Services Division (PSD) regarding the proposed Pharmacy Bill 2015 .

The Federation of Private Medical Practitioners Associations Malaysia (FPMPAM), the Medical Practitioners Coalition of Malaysia (MPCN) and others involved said they were not allowed to debate the contents of the bill during the meeting, causing it to end prematurely.

"At the very outset of the meeting, the doctors' request for details of the Bill to be made available for the discussion was denied," said the parties representing the doctors in a statement today.

The other parties involved were the Islamic Medical Association of Malaysia (IMAM), the Pertubuhan Doktor-Doktor Islam Malaysia (PERDIM) and the Academy of Family Practitioners Malaysia (AFPM).

The Pharmacy Bill seeks to legislate that medicine can only be dispensed by pharmacies and not doctors ending the current long-standing practice where general practitioners both prescribe and dispense medicine after diagnosing their patients.

Besides the ministry's outright refusal to debate the bill with medical practitioners, the groups also expressed concern on how the proposed legislation could interfere with the continuity of patient care by doctors.

Another concern was the bill could unnecessarily increase healthcare costs and make patients more vulnerable to 'exploitation by monopolistic and oligopolistic mega-pharmacy groups.

The PSD, when contacted, told Malaysiakini they were not yet ready to comment on the bill, pending further discussion with stakeholders.

Minister defends bill

Meanwhile, Bernama reports Health Minister Dr S Subramaniam as saying the health ministry will only make a final decision on dispensing separation of the proposed pharmacy bill once all strengths and weaknesses have been scrutinised and deliberated upon.

He claimed 'vigorous' engagement sessions were ongoing between the ministry and various stakeholders.

He said another round of engagement was scheduled for March 9, between his ministry and

the Attorney-General's Chambers with concerned consumer groups, namely the Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services (Cuepacs), the Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations (Fomca), the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP), the Persatuan Pengguna Islam Malaysia (PPIM) and Consumers International.

He added this would be followed by engagement sessions with other government agencies on March 16, pharmacy associations (March 23) and the academia (March 30).

Dr Subramaniam (pix, above right) said whatever changes made would lead to improved patient care through better access to medicines; healthy population through use of quality medicines; cost containment of the healthcare system through good medicines management; and sustainable healthcare system for all, via partnership and collaboration of all healthcare players.

"It is focused at strengthening patient care and healthcare system in our country. The bill must be seen in holistically," he argued.

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