

COMMENT | Responding to open letter to PM from 'MOH specialist'

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COMMENT | I have read the open letter of Dr Tachdjian to the prime minister "Covid-19: Wake up, enough talk, take action" with great intent.

Even though it is not directed to me, but as the director-general of Health, I have to understand what this "Health Ministry (MOH) staffer" is trying to relay, regardless of the person's rank, grade, or profession.

It occurred to me when it was said that the doctor was an "MOH specialist" it would surely attract everyone's attention to read it.

A specialist doctor with the MOH will surely be ethical and have credibility. That is what I hope for from an MOH specialist.

I must admit, doctor, I am disappointed. In the open letter, you have clearly identified a patient to the public by referring to a high profile individual in Sabah

who is warded at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (HQE).

For your information, doctor, this is against the ethics of a medical doctor. Patient confidentiality is a priority for the medical profession, and the MOH always stresses this. I hope this is not something that you regularly do, because the MOH relies on specialist medical officers to educate medical officers and medical interns.

You are also familiar with the inner workings of HQE, but you may need to check again the protocol for handling Patient Under Investigation (PUI) that is Covid-19 positive to Covid-19 hospitals. Cases that have been confirmed as Covid-19 positive and are stable will be admitted directly to the Covid-19 ward.

The same protocol is used in all cases, regardless of the case's status in society. There might be situations where cases have to wait for beds to be emptied at the Covid-19 ward. This may happen from time to time.

It's true that the number of Covid-19 cases is rising, especially in Sabah. I myself present the daily date every day on various platforms, including in daily meetings with the prime minister and the Covid-19 press conferences at around 6pm. Now both are done via video conferencing.

I have also explained the measures taken by the government in ensuring there is enough testing capacity at labs, increasing the number of beds for Covid-19 cases so there are enough, the purchase of equipment and distribution of ventilators and so on. Just look at the infographic that I uploaded. It is very easy to understand.

At the start, health workers in Kota Kinabalu were mobilised to help hospitals in eastern Sabah, as well as quarantine centres and low-risk Covid-19 treatment centres. After that, MOH mobilised health workers from all states to Sabah. They were placed at hospitals in Kota Kinabalu to fill in the manpower gaps in Kota Kinabalu.

It can't be denied that it is more challenging when health workers are also infected with Covid-19, either from the community, workplace, co-workers or while handling Covid-19 cases. They need to be hospitalised for treatment, and close contacts need to be quarantined.

However, praise has to be given to HQE's management and also the Sabah Health Department. The mobilisation plan is continuing, services are operational, and the situation is expected to get better. Health workers continue to work resolutely, while more medical support teams arrive.

You had good views regarding personal protective equipment (PPE) stocks. Early planning needs to be done and stocks need to be monitored closely. MOH continues to ensure it is enough for hospitals throughout Malaysia, including at HQE. Attached is the status of PPE stocks in Sabah.

Central approval had been obtained on Oct 2 for the emergency acquisition of PPEs for Sabah. All have been properly planned by federal agencies, MOH, as well as the Sabah Health Department. The central database system developed during the first and second wave of Covid-19 has taught us to be more prepared.

I am grateful that the MOH is not alone in this effort. It is impossible for MOH to handle Covid-19 alone. Other federal agencies have moved together with MOH, too many of them for me to name one by one. The same goes for state governments, down to the district level. The private sector, NGOs, organisations, and all levels of society.

Everyone joined together to flatten the curve during the second wave.

The approach taken is the "whole of government, the whole of society approach". I am always asked by foreign countries about this. I am proud (to say) "we use the whole of government, the whole of society approach".

But we can do better. I urge everyone, let us not point fingers and lay blame. Let us focus our energy and efforts to fight our common enemy, that is Covid-19, while we pray and put trust in the divine.

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