

## **YOURSAY | Criticism of doctor a disservice to frontliners**

**Malaysiakini**

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**Yoursay**

YOURSAY | 'All efforts of frontliners have been in vain and undone by greedy and self-serving politicians.'

Vijay47: Dear Health Ministry director-general Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, you are recognised as the final bastion in our fight against Covid-19, and you have carried out your responsibilities with admirable commitment despite the occasional setback and disappointment. You have been in the daily forefront, leading the frontliners and those who work unseen. We all owe you all immense gratitude.

It is wholly understandable that following the open letter from 'Dr Tachdjian', you would want to explain the position from your perspective. But please permit me to make two related comments.

First, you allege that in identifying a Covid patient, Tachdjian had gone afoul of

professional and medical confidentiality ethics. I presume you are referring to Tachdjian stating that “the Sabah chief minister is warded at Queen Elizabeth Hospital but like all VIPs, never had to lie in the Emergency Department waiting for a bed in the ward.”

I don't think proper conduct has been breached here. The Sabah chief minister falling ill is a well-known fact and had actually become a nationwide matter of controversy regarding perceived indifference by politicians towards anti-Covid-19 standard operating procedures (SOPs) and other precautions.

If he indeed “never had to lie waiting for a bed”, that would be regrettable; we strongly hold that once a patient enters the doorway of a public hospital, whether prince or pauper, he should be entitled to the same treatment as anyone else. Yet I concede that reality often clashes with the ideal.

Secondly, you also mention the "whole of government, the whole of society approach". Noble as this sounds, alas, again reality collides with idealism.

On both occasions when everyone involved was summoned to a federal meeting, a gathering of urgency I may add, the “opposition states” were excluded. How could this ever be justified when politics again supersede national health?

I can well imagine that you would have been overshadowed by the prime minister. But did you, as the medical authority in charge, voice your strong protest to this form of “whole approach” even if it would have proven futile?

I do not write to support Tachdjian or to condemn you, sir, it is obvious that both of you are driven only by concern for all of us. Yes, I truly pray for better times for all of us.

Scorpion: While the CM being warded is known, the circumstances should not be divulged by the medical specialist and this goes against ethics of the profession. This is what the Health DG has pointed out.

And come on, do you expect a CM to be made to wait in line? I am all for equality, but we have to just understand that it is not the case when the situation involves a VVIP - this applies anywhere in the world, look at US President Donald Trump, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, et cetera.

It's easy for us to drag the DG into this but always remember Noor Hisham has to answer to his political masters, and he does not have the final authority.

That's the reality of life; in any form of society, there is no true equality. Some people get preferred treatment, especially if they are head of states, it just is. If

they are scoundrel VVIPs that's a different point, don't elect them in the first place.

Noor Hisham is doing the best with the cards that he has in his hands. We should stay focused that the ones screwing this up are the politicians, and the DG and his team of frontliners deserve our unwavering support.

GrayImpala9653: So, @Scorpion, let's save all the scoundrel VVIPs and give them a red-carpet welcome to the first-class ward and the rakyat are made to wait till death beckons them? If it's okay for all the other countries, then it's alright for us too?

Justice: Dr Anthony Fauci in the US even forcefully and consistently criticised and contradicted Trump on the Covid-19 pandemic. So what is the big deal if and when a doctor speaks up his mind to improve our current system, strategies and actions in fighting the pandemic?

The big difference between us and US is that our civil service officials are afraid to speak up against our dumb politicians. If you know the truth, why be afraid? "Berani kerana benar" (dare to be truthful) are the words and message for all to uphold.

Sphzxcv: The frontliners fighting this pandemic have been risking their lives since March. Many were infected, but they continued to sacrifice for the country.

They were slowly winning the fight, but all their efforts have been in vain and undone by greedy and self-serving politicians. Who wouldn't be disappointed and angry?

Ghosthowalks: Noor Hisham, admittedly, you have done a good job during the first waves of the pandemic and you deserve all the accolades given then.

What you did during these past months, however, is nothing to be proud of. Yielding to the politicians and their whims and fancies, and now causing the third wave of blown-out coronavirus is unforgivable.

Why didn't you place a movement control order (MCO) on the many districts in Sabah's east coast before the state elections when it's obvious to everyone that coronavirus has gone out of control?

Didn't you see video footage of VVIPs campaigning in the recent Sabah state election in many districts without following your Health Ministry SOPs, which was so glaringly obvious for all to see? Why were you so quiet and not reprimand and impose fines on them?

Moreover, why didn't you have the foresight to impose compulsory Covid-19 swab testing and mandatory 14-days quarantine on all returnees from Sabah to Peninsular Malaysia? And this is now exacerbated by the spread of coronavirus everywhere.

This is a disservice to all the frontliners who had worked so hard to contain the spread of coronavirus. Please walk the talk and ensure all possible help is rendered to douse the Covid fire. I wish you well and every success in your endeavour for the sake of all Malaysians.

SHGC: As a medical doctor myself, dear Noor Hisham, I concur with you completely that Tachdjian should not have divulged any patient's confidential details in public, and he or she should uphold the highest degree of professionalism.

Having said that, I urged you to "forgive" the writer on the basis that I believe that Tachdjian must have been extremely frustrated and worn out to pen this letter. There's a heavy air of despair, desperation and disappointment palpably felt in the letter. Sometimes in our desperation, we may have said things we know we should not have said.

Secondly, while Tachdjian might have miscalculated the reason for a VVIP to be

admitted directly without going through the agonising wait in the emergency department, we must also ask ourselves where does this perception, that VVIPs or VIPs are given special treatment in a public hospital, originates from?

It indeed stemmed from a chronically long-held perception and practice (whether rightly or wrongly, I leave it to the readers to judge) that VVIPs and VIPs are fast-tracked along the waiting line in accessing public healthcare service.

Perhaps a massive overhaul of the entire healthcare system is desperately needed because what is portrayed in the letter by Tachdjian is probably only a symptomatic manifestation of what has been malignantly rooting inside in the system for years.

VP Biden: Having read the letter which is clearly aimed at the utter failure of the backdoor government and its “abah”, Noor Hisham has unfortunately waded into a territory he should have stayed away from.

The response to that letter, if any, should have been from the backdoor government. As a civil servant, Noor Hisham is better equipped to handle the task at hand, which is to combat the pandemic. Don't be sucked into the government's failings and games, Noor Hisham.

PW Cheng: From what I can see, Noor Hisham is the fall guy for his political masters. There must be instructions from his political boss to rebut Tachdjian, whom I see had no malicious intentions but to highlight mismanagements of Covid-19 due to many cases of double standards by the Perikatan Nasional (PN) government.

During the previous Umno regime - and PN is a mirror image of Umno - it is not unusual that senior government servants are made to be beholden to the ruling administration.

Unfortunately, this is another sad case of a good and dedicated senior government servant who succumbed to pressure from his political masters.

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