

Politicians, please stay out of MOH
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I read with interest in the mainstream media regarding the health minister's recent appeal to politicians to stop interfering in doctors' transfers. This, of course, is a long-standing problem in not only the Health Ministry but almost every other ministry in the country, especially when it involves the transfer of senior officers. However the health minister should also look into other areas where politicians have been known to be a nuisance. Politicians should further:

1. Not interfere where hospitals are to be built. We frequently have multi-million ringgit hospitals in constituencies where there are actually more cattle than people just because the ruling party candidate there wants a leg-up to win the election. This is an absolute waste of health resources. Even recently the Ministry of Health suddenly allocated RM16 million for a 'health clinic' for Ijok which has a total population of less than 15,000.
2. Not interfere with who gets the equipment contracts to supply the MOH.
3. Not push their own favoured, frequently incompetent contractors, to build hospitals.
4. Not interfere with who gets to supply pharmaceuticals and consumables.
5. Wives or husbands of politicians should not be promoted for positions when there are other more loyal and dedicated employees who have been waiting for ages to be promoted.
6. They shouldn't lobby for their favorite officer, son, daughter, 'Pengarah', deputy DG, DG, etc for Datukships and Tan Sri's.
7. Not interfere with who gets to operate the hospital car park.
8. Not interfere with who gets to operate the hospital cafeteria.
9. Not interfere with who gets to operate the hospital's mini-market.
10. Not interfere with who gets the scholarship to pursue their postgraduate studies.
11. Not interfere with who gets to be the head of department, dean, 'pengarah', deputy DG, DG, etc. In addition, politicians shouldn't influence who gets to enter medical school.
12. Not interfere with who gets which MOH privatisation deal.
13. We also shouldn't let politicians decide who gets to set up medical schools and also take excessive students without lecturers.
14. Not tell medical schools to drop standards to allow students to pass.
15. Not decide which medical school gets recognised and which doesn't.

I am certain readers can add on more to this list. How on earth is the MOH going to police and enforce this? They don't have the resources, manpower or even administrative or political clout. No amount of memos, rules, regulations or acts of parliament are going to stop this nonsense. In fact if the MOH tried, they would probably be playing 'catch the thief' and forget all about patient care.

The minister really needs to look into who is advising him as it is beginning to appear as a case of Nigel Hawthorne's paradoxical maneuvering and machinations in the BBC sitcom 'Yes Minister'.

Not too long ago, in a 'quick-fix' solution, the cabinet approved the recruitment of 1,000 foreign doctors. However in 2003, reportedly due to poor performances ranging from poor skills, communication and discipline, 120 of these doctors were fired and a further number got terminated last year. This reported in the media round the world giving the impression that officials running the MOH may have no clue what they are doing.

Political interference in the MOH will only stop if the MOH starts to look into decentralising and to have less 'government' in its management. And to achieve this, it needs to look into systems such as that of the National Health Service in the UK or the one in Singapore. It is high time the MOH stop duplicating services (especially in towns with multiple private hospitals) and just work out a scheme to outsource services as is currently being done for heart, dialysis and cancer services.

Stopping the wastage at the MOH where costs and services are hugely marked up by rent-seeking politicians and just about anyone else wanting to have a finger in the pie is long past overdue.

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