

Ministry watch on two private medical colleges

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PUTRAJAYA: Two private medical colleges are in hot water for allegedly producing housemen who are not up to the Health Ministry's standards.

Its minister, Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek, said his ministry was keeping a close watch on them. He declined to name the two colleges.

The colleges are believed to have too many students and not enough lecturers or facilities to ensure a quality education.

They allegedly have a lecturer-student ratio of 1:20, which exceeds the required ratio of 1:6 or 1:8 students in their clinical year.

The matter came to light when the hospitals, where the housemen from the two colleges were serving, complained.

The health authorities began monitoring the colleges six months ago.

"A public institution like Universiti Malaya's medical faculty can only produce 200 graduates a year, but these private colleges can produce 300 a year.

"We are concerned about the quality of education at these places and whether they have the capacity to cope with so many students," Dr Chua said yesterday.

There are seven private colleges offering medical degrees. Dr Chua said the two institutions concerned had been in operation for about 10 years.

Health Ministry director-general Tan Sri Dr Ismail Merican is expected to meet the colleges' management over the complaints.

Dr Ismail is also the president of the Malaysian Medical Council, which oversees the accreditation of medical colleges.

He said the colleges would be given warnings and if they failed to buck up, sterner action would be taken. The worst-case scenario would involve transferring the students to another institution

and revoking the college's accreditation.

"But I don't think it will come to that. I am sure that once we raise the matter with them, they will comply as it is in their best interest to do so.

"Whatever happens, we will ensure that the students are taken care of and not left in limbo," Dr Ismail said.

Earlier, Dr Chua held a dialogue with 350 final-year medical students from Universiti Malaya, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Dr Chua said the general concern students raised during the dialogue was the long working hours for housemen.

"We acknowledge that housemen have to work up to 36 hours when on call, but

all this is a normal part of clinical practice. The ministry is trying to improve the situation, but I also told the students that if they are not willing to make sacrifices, then they should choose other careers."

Dr Chua said about five per cent of the 1,400 housemen who graduate from local public and private universities each year do not make the cut as medical officers, mainly due to poor attitudes and disciplinary problems.

"Although it is a small percentage, we want to send out a message that there will be no compromise on quality," he said.

Those who fail to pass as medical officers may have their housemanship extended for another six months to a year.