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Dr M: Rethink Pharmacy Bill

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BURDENSOME: Proposal to separate pharmacies from clinics might have repercussions

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FORMER prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday spoke out against a proposed plan to separate pharmacies from clinics, saying that it would place a burden on patients and may put their health at risk.

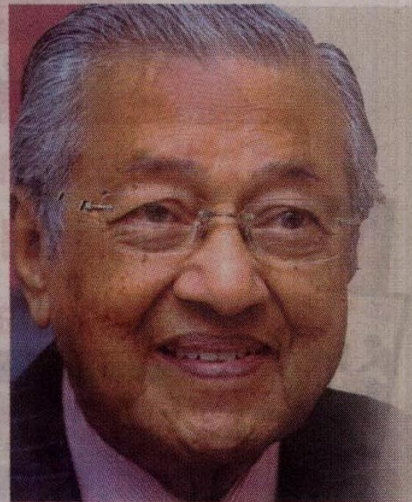
Dr Mahathir, a former medical doctor, said unlike many clinics, most pharmacies and dispensaries did not operate around the clock, which would make it difficult for patients who needed medication late at night.

"When they are prescribed something at night, they would have to go to a dispensary, which may be far away or closed.

"The patient may be too ill to move, so they would have to send someone else to get the medicines for them. It takes time and in the meantime, the patient could die.

"Sick people don't follow the clock," he said during a press conference here.

The proposal is part of a new Pharmacy Bill



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Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad
Former prime minister

currently under review by the Attorney-General's Chambers.

Dr Mahathir said it would be more cost-effective to maintain the present system of allowing doctors to dispense medication.

"I would know, as I was a doctor before. Patients often came to me at odd hours, such as 3am and 4am. I had to carry my own stock of medicines with me, so that I could treat patients immediately.

"It's more difficult for the patients if we are asked to get medicines from dispensaries."

Dr Mahathir dismissed claims by the Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society that separating dispensaries from clinics would reduce the number of medication errors made by doctors, as pharmacists would be able to double-check the prescription.

"It's a possible benefit, but pharmacists get sleepy and make mistakes, too."

Commenting on impending Goods and Services Tax (GST), he said the public should make their voices heard if they felt the list of GST-exempted medicines was too short.

When announcing Budget 2015, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had said selected medicines, including 2,900 medicine brands used to treat 30 types of diseases, would be GST-exempt when the tax comes into effect on April 1.

"If the people feel this is a burden for them, they can tell the government 'please don't have anymore taxes,'" he said, after witnessing the signing of a 10-year collaboration between Perdana University and the University of California, San Diego, here yesterday.

In a speech earlier, Dr Mahathir said healthcare costs had risen exponentially since he was a practising doctor, describing the government's ability to continue providing free medical treatment as "a miracle".

"When I was practising medicine, cough medicine cost one sen per bottle. But now some antibiotic treatments cost as much as RM5 per tablet, and (multiplied by) four tablets a day.

"It's unaffordable and how the government has been able to sustain this free medical treatment is almost a miracle."

Present were Perdana University vice-chancellor Datuk Dr Sothi Rachagan, board of governors chairman Tan Sri Dr Mohan Swami, UC San Diego school of medicine dean Dr David Brenner and UC San Diego Health Sciences International executive director Dr Mounir Soliman.