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Doctors should continue to dispense medicine, says Dr M

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SERDANG: The present practice where doctors dispense medicines to patients should be maintained for the sake of public convenience, said Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The former prime minister said it would be a problem if a sick person has to make another trip to the pharmacy to get his medication.

"It (also) defeats the purpose of one asking a doctor to make house calls because he still needs to get out of the house to buy his medicine.

"This is more troublesome if one falls sick at night. We know there are 24-hour clinics, but if this new practice (of dispensing separation) is put in place, then pharmacies will also have to remain open round the clock. I am of the opinion that the government should just maintain the current practice," he said in response to one of the most hotly debated issues this year.

A medical practitioner himself before opting for politics, Dr Mahathir said when he was still practising, he had to lug around a bag full of medicine when making house calls at odd hours so he could dispense to patients immediately.

"If I did not carry it, how would my patient get his medicine? If he could not move and depended on someone to go to town and buy it from him, it takes time and anything can happen," said Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir also said that the public should petition the Government if they wanted more medicine to be exempt from goods and services tax (GST).

"If people think this will be a burden to them, they should bring the matter up," he added.

GST will have to be paid for medicines that

are not on the Customs Department essential medicine list when it is implemented on April 1.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir, who is Chancellor of Perdana University, pointed out that the cost of medicine and medical services had escalated so much that it was a "miracle" that the Government could continue to sustain the service with nominal fees.

"When I was practising, my fee was RM3 per consultation, RM5 if one was given an injection, and RM6 if it was a house call. Charges were low but it didn't really matter because the aim was to provide modern healthcare instead of people seeking treatment the traditional way," he told an audience comprising the university's medical students.

He told the undergraduates that being a doctor requires lifelong learning as new discoveries, equipment and drugs would constantly emerge.

"To be able to do so means one needs to read, and most of the journals and findings are in English. That is why I emphasised the importance of learning Science and Mathematics in English. Only with good command of the language can we keep ourselves updated with the latest treatments," he added.

Dr Mahathir also witnessed the signing of an agreement between Perdana University and University of California, San Diego (UCSD), which would allow the two universities to further develop Perdana University's graduate school of medicine.

Also present were Perdana University's board of governors chairman Tan Sri Dr Mohan Swani and UCSD vice-chancellor for health sciences and dean of the school of medicine David A. Brenner.