

1 Care merely 'upgrade' of current healthcare system, says minister
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By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

GOMBAK, Feb 11 — Putrajaya's controversial 1 Care proposal is merely an "upgrade" of Malaysia's current two-pronged healthcare system, Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said today.

The health minister told reporters that any discussion of 1 Care was "premature".

He repeatedly stressed that the matter is at a "discussion level" in what appears to be an attempt to allay the public's alarm and fury following disclosures on the internet by prominent healthcare professionals, including those who were involved in talks with the government over 1 Care's execution as far back as three years ago.

The health minister today denied 1 Care would force Malaysians to contribute 10 per cent of their salaries to finance the scheme. — file pic

"We are not changing the system; it is an upgrade. We are improving the system," he said.

He added that his ministry was looking at "many other countries" to base the 1 Care healthcare plan on.

"The demand for health has increased, the burden of health is now higher," Liow said, attributing this as the main reason for an "upgrade" of the country's healthcare plan.

When asked why the government did not just increase the current healthcare budget instead of introducing a new system, Liow said the country's "healthcare budget has increased every year."

"Last year, it was RM16 billion, a 10 per cent increase from the previous year (2010). We have been doing that," he said.

The MCA minister confirmed that the blueprint on 1 Care is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2013, and that his ministry has been given a two-year timeline.

"If it (1 Care) is not suitable, the government can scrap it.

"What is important is feedback from professional bodies ... we can't give information now, we don't have information now, the committee is still discussing it," Liow said.

Yesterday, the Health Ministry's director-general also insisted that the controversial 1 Care proposal is still a "work in progress" and that the government could reject the scheme if it is found to be unacceptable to Malaysians.

Datuk Seri Dr Hasan Abdul Rahman took great pains to point out that the details surrounding the healthcare scheme are still "ideas" and "proposals" and that nothing has been set in stone, despite news reports stating otherwise.

"Talking about 1 Care, this is still very much (a) work in progress. There are 11 main

Technical Working Groups (TWGs) with multi-sectoral participation, both public and private," he had said.

Liow today denied 1 Care would force Malaysians to contribute 10 per cent of their salaries to finance the scheme, maintaining yet again that proposals have not even reached the policy stage.

"These are spins by irresponsible people," he said, adding that the said proposal touched on a collective contribution between the "government, employer, and employee."

Dr Hasan had offered an explanation yesterday, in which he clarified that RM34 billion has been set aside by the government and the private sector for this new scheme, and that under the scheme, all costs related to medical visits and treatments will be borne by a central government agency which will pool contributions from "the government, employer, employee and those self-employed."

The deputy director of the National Health Financing unit, Dr Rozita Halina Hussein, said on Thursday 1 Care would have to be made mandatory, but that private healthcare providers would be given a choice as to whether to participate in the new healthcare system that has seen stiff opposition from stakeholder groups.

A source, however, told The Malaysian Insider that the healthcare scheme is at a "very, very advanced" stage of planning and is not at as preliminary a stage as the Health Ministry has made it out to be.

1 Care has come under fire from healthcare practitioners and the public, who claim that individuals and businesses will be forced to hand over 10 per cent of their earnings each month to the government-run insurance fund.

The scheme is expected to replace the current two-tier healthcare system with one which integrates both private and government hospitals in the hope of ensuring more equitable healthcare for Malaysians of all classes.

Under the present system, patients can choose to seek treatment at either private clinics or hospitals and pay out of their own pockets or opt for government clinics or hospitals instead, where they will pay a nominal fee for basic, federally subsidised healthcare.

The ministry has assured critics that the 1 Care scheme will not burden the public with undue costs, saying that talks on the financial arrangements will be made available while discussions on their impact to the government and taxpayers were ongoing.

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