

1 Care to be made mandatory, says Health Ministry
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 9 — The Health Ministry said today that the 1 Care national healthcare proposal will be made mandatory for all Malaysians, in an admission that is likely to fuel further controversy.

Despite insisting in the past week that the proposal was still at an early stage, Health Ministry deputy director for the National Health Financing unit Dr Rozita Halina Hussein said today that 1 Care would have to be made mandatory.

However, she said private healthcare providers would be given a choice on whether to participate in the new healthcare system that has seen stiff opposition from stakeholder groups.

She also denied rumours that the ministry had finalised a decision to force Malaysians to contribute 10 per cent of their salaries to finance the scheme.

There were also no plans to cap the number of medical consultations, she said.

Last night, director-general of Health Datuk Seri Dr Hasan Abdul Rahman also went on national television to campaign for the new scheme that critics have suggested will see a mandatory salary deduction for all Malaysians to finance it.

He said 1 Care would give Malaysians equal access to government and private healthcare.

But he did not give any details and also did not comment on the fact that most Malaysians already have access to private healthcare under the existing dual-track healthcare system.

Dr Hasan only said that the ministry has two years to complete the blueprint and that at present, it was still in talks with 11 technical working groups, stressing that the plan was not finalised.

Under the existing public-private system, Malaysians can choose to see a doctor in government-owned medical facilities or seek treatment in a private clinic or hospital.

Most companies already pay for their employees, and their immediate families, to receive treatment at private medical centres.

The government also pays for private medical care in some cases for civil servants.

But Dr Hasan told state-owned TV channel RTM1 in an interview on its show "Dialog" aired last night: "Wouldn't it be wonderful if, without counting on whether it is government or private service, the public could afford easy access to healthcare, a simplified access with a high responsive rate."

The 1 Care proposal has triggered a furore from the private medical service and alarmed the

public after details of the proposed healthcare system were published online in the past few weeks.

Both medical practitioners and the public are growing increasingly unhappy and allege that individuals and businesses will be forced to pay 10 per cent of their income to the proposed government healthcare insurance on a monthly basis, among other things.

According to the proposal too, each person will be assigned to one doctor in a certain area and will not be allowed to choose another. Individuals will also be limited on the number of medical visits a month.

Yesterday, Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai said the proposal for business groups to be charged a 10 per cent levy of their income for an insurance fund under the 1 Care scheme would be reviewed.

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