

1 Care roadshow an 'afterthought', says PKR president
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By Yow Hong Chieh

KUALA LUMPUR, March 23 — Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail has charged that the 1 Care roadshow is an "afterthought" as it was mooted only after strong public opposition.

The PKR president said it was surprising Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai had waited till now after the issue had hit the headlines to engage the public, questioning the health minister's sincerity.

"Like other BN pronouncements such as the SBPA (Public Service Remuneration Scheme), it seems consultation is only an afterthought," Dr Wan Azizah (picture) said in a statement today.

"We have received complaints from doctors involved in previous consultations on 1 Care that there was no true engagement or dialogue involved. The government is set to continue with 1 Care."

Dr Wan Azizah, who served as a government doctor for 14 years before entering politics, urged Liow to end his silence on the opposition's suggestion on what should be done to improve the healthcare system.

She reiterated that government should increase its healthcare expenditure to between five and six per cent of GDP, as recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO), from 2.2 per cent in 2008.

Putrajaya should also first plug leakages in the system — which according to WHO causes 20 to 40 per cent wastage in the healthcare budget — as the introduction of 1 Care will "increase the opportunity for corruption" if existing inefficiencies were not addressed first, she stressed.

"This is similar to the privatisation of various sectors of the country's healthcare system over the past two decades which were supposed to increase efficiency yet only resulted in more leakages," she said.

"This includes the privatisation of the government medical store, university hospitals, the cardiology department of Kuala Lumpur Hospital and the hospital support services which have substantially increased healthcare costs... without improving efficiency."

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

The scheme is expected to replace the current two-tier healthcare system with one that 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 that will be made available and their impact on the government and taxpayers were ongoing.

Liow said last Thursday that the blueprint for 1 Care will only be done in two years, and urged all parties to not to jump to any conclusions as discussions with stakeholders were still at an early stage.

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