

**Dr M to blame for costly healthcare, says anti-1 Care group**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**February 18 , 2012**  
**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 18 — The Citizens' Healthcare Coalition (CHC) has blamed Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the country's escalating cost of healthcare, linking this to sweeping healthcare reforms pushed through by the former prime minister during the 1980s.

CHC, a coalition of medical practitioners and consumer associations formed recently to protest against 1 Care, cited the corporatisation of the National Heart Institute (IJN) as an example and said it has become one of the country's costliest specialist centres.

It claimed that waiting time for the needy and poor have become "inordinately long" at the institute and could go up to two years, while those who can afford it could pay to get their treatment overnight.

"This is what privatisation does and we can credit Tun Mahathir for this dismal state of affairs," CHC representative Dr T. Jayabalan said in a statement here.

He added that in 1994 during Dr Mahathir's tenure, pharmaceutical services were also privatised, but with the government becoming a stakeholder.

"Along with the privatisation came a 15-year monopoly for pharmaceutical supplies to the government health facilities by Pharmaniaga.

"It was a closed tender and this disallowed competition. It is common knowledge that competition will bring down prices," he charged.

Under Dr Mahathir's privatisation moves, Dr Jayabalan said the prices of generic drugs also soared, effectively denying lower-income earners access to the medicines.

Dr Mahathir's healthcare reforms caused prices to rise, asserted the CHC. He also cited a study carried out by Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) researchers in 2008 on drug prices pre- and post-privatisation, which revealed a 10.42 per cent increase from 1995 to 1995, compared to prices before privatisation.

"In addition, as a result of free market forces, there was a massive price increase of 64.04 per cent in the prices of drugs from 2001-2003.

"The study also indicates that drug prices do not match the inflation rate or the Consumer Price Index," he said.

As such, Jayabalan said Dr Mahathir's argument in support of 1 Care was "warped", insisting that healthcare should not be made to fit into a market system.

On Thursday, Dr Mahathir pointed to the rise in healthcare costs to the government, apparently making the case for Putrajaya's proposal for a new contributory system called 1 Care.

The former prime minister would not delve deep into the matter, but said that the government could no longer shoulder the country's healthcare burden on its own.

Disagreeing, Dr Jayabalan pointed out that the government has only been spending about two per cent of its annual gross domestic product (GDP) on healthcare for the past 13 years although the World Bank recommends an expenditure of at least five per cent.

"It is therefore a little farfetched to say that the government can no longer continue subsidising healthcare.

"Knowing that 60 to 70 per cent of Malaysians are dependent on public facilities, it is a great disservice to the people to privatise healthcare and make the people pay for what ought to be the government's responsibility and duty to its citizens," he said.

Putrajaya's 1 Care proposal has come under fire from industry practitioners and consumer associations who claim the system would force all wage-earners to contribute some 10 per cent of their income to a government-run insurance scheme.

Under the scheme, critics say, the public would only receive limited benefits and still be forced to fork out hefty sums for basic healthcare.

According to one online news report, "1 Care aims to place private medicine under government control, a step further than former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad's sweeping health privatisation upheavals in the 1980s that delivered a hefty windfall to Umno's partners, including Dr Mahathir's son, Mokhzani."

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/dr-m-to-blame-for-costly-healthcare-says-anti-1-care-group/>