

**1<sup>st</sup> July 2021**

**Code Black Protest and Proposed Nationwide One-Day Strike on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2021 by Malaysian Contract Doctors**

We, Malaysian doctors from the **Malaysian Doctors for Women & Children** support the Code Black protest by the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA)<sup>1</sup> from 1<sup>st</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021 in support of contract doctors and the proposed nationwide one-day strike on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2021 by Malaysian contract doctors.

We refer to the protest by MMA and strike proposed by Malaysian doctors under contractual employment of the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH) which was first introduced in 2016 as a stop gap measure due to influx of Malaysian medical graduates and MOH's inability to recruit all these new medical graduates<sup>2</sup>. Since 2016, only 789 contract doctors were offered permanent positions<sup>3</sup>. Unfortunately, due to change of governments and a lack of long-term planning by policymakers, these contract doctors are only having their contractual employment extended by one to two years (solely due to COVID-19 pandemic) instead of being offered permanent positions.

We support these doctors because:

1. Contract doctors are not being given opportunities for medical specialisation as only permanent doctors are allowed to apply for to the MSc specialty training programmes<sup>2,3</sup>. Additionally, the prerequisites and requirements to applying to specialty training programmes is unclear making it harder for aspiring specialists to prepare and develop their curriculum vitae towards their medical specialty of interest.
2. Contract doctors receive lower financial remuneration compared to permanent doctors despite doing the same work<sup>3</sup>.
3. This creates a two-tier system with contract doctors occupying the least influence position in the medical hierarchy which impacts their emotional well-being in an already stressful environment.
4. Patients need the best and most compassionate care. But for this to be achieved, doctors need to feel well, supported and given opportunities to progress.
5. There were only about 3.4 clinical specialists for every 10,000 people nationwide. This number is significantly lower than that of the average 14.3 specialists to 10,000 population recommended by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)<sup>3</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted we need more doctors who will continue to specialise in various medical specialties.
6. We also reject calls by Malaysian Public Health Physicians' Association (PPKAM) and Pertubuhan Doktor-Doktor Islam Malaysia (Perdim) and Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba for suggesting pro-Bumiputera policies in the selection of permanent doctors<sup>4</sup>. We are against the racial discrimination policies being applied when contracts are changed from temporary to permanent. We are aware that many non-Malay doctors feel discriminated against already in the government healthcare system. No discrimination based on race and religion should be practised upon Malaysian doctors.



7. Doctors are feeling physically and emotionally exhausted after COVID-19 pandemic. Many have also become unwell or have died due to COVID-19. No doctor shirked from their duties despite the enormity of the challenges and fear that COVID-19 brought. To then threaten their employment and futures this way is unconscionable.
8. There will be a shortage of clinical specialists in the future if these policies continue. We know of Malaysian doctors who have migrated overseas for better medical employment opportunities due to the lack of career progression and permanent jobs.

It must be emphasised that this strike is a last-resort option for these Malaysian contract doctors. In the medical line of work, every doctor espouses the ethical principle of non-maleficence or “do not harm”. Patient safety is of utmost priority and these contract doctors have ensured that the quality of patient care will not be disrupted. Plans have been made with colleagues – permanent doctors, trainee doctors and consultants to ensure no disruption to service.

It is inhumane and unacceptable that these contract doctors need to fight for better employment rights and prospects while working tirelessly in this COVID-19 pandemic. The untold human suffering experienced by these contract doctors especially in this COVID-19 pandemic should be considered in any government policies on recruitment and retention of doctors in the MOH.

To the Malaysian public, you can support the Code Black protest in these ways<sup>1</sup>:

1. Individuals, companies, or institutions change their personal profile photos or logo on social media to black or monochrome.
2. 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021 is declared by the MMA as Black Monday. On this day, the public is encouraged to take photos of themselves wearing black-coloured attire for work with placards saying, “We stand with Contract Healthcare Workers” and the hashtags #saveMYcontractHCW #BlackMondayMY and #CodeBlackMY for social media.

For more information, please refer to the MMA Section Concerning House Officers, Medical Officers, and Specialists (SCHOMOS) Facebook page<sup>1</sup>.

## References

1. Bala Krishnan D. MMA calls on public to support “Code Black” protest. *New Straits Times Malaysia*. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/06/703401/mma-calls-public-support-code-black-protest>. Published June 29, 2021.
2. Anand R. Underpaid and overworked, Malaysia’s contract doctors revolt amid Covid-19 surge. *The Strait Times*. <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/underpaid-and-overworked-malaysias-contract-doctors-revolt-amid-covid-19-surge>. Published 2021.
3. Hakim A. Why Are Malaysian Doctors Planning To Go On Strike? *The Rakyat Post*. <https://www.therakyatpost.com/2021/06/28/why-are-malaysian-doctors-planning-to-going-on-strike/>. Published June 28, 2021.
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