

Online survey showed many docs wanting to quit

Published on: Daily Express Front-page, Sun, Apr 13, 2025

By: David Thien

CODE Blue Survey published in 2023. Code Blue's online survey titled "Dissatisfaction Among Health Care Professionals and Workers in Malaysia's Government Health Service", was conducted from Jan 11-24, 2023.

The survey among government doctors, pharmacists, dentists, medical assistants, nurses and allied health care workers nationwide, showed more than half are willing to go on strike, while seven in 10 are thinking of quitting.

Government health care professionals in Malaysia nationwide, not just doctors, are reporting high levels of anger and dissatisfaction at the situation in the public health care system.

Even though Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's administration appears to treat health as status quo, a whopping 95 per cent of the poll believe that Malaysia's public health care system is in "crisis".

A disturbing 73 per cent of respondents said they're thinking about quitting the government health service.

Over half (52 per cent) said they would take part in a strike if one was organised for public health care workers, while a third (34 per cent) expressed uncertainty about their participation.

Put together, many government health care professionals are either willing to or uncertain about walking on the job. Only 14 per cent opposed taking industrial action.

The fact that more respondents are willing to quit rather than to go on strike shows potential challenges by the Government to retain public health care professionals.

Industrial action means that workers may remain in the service if their demands are acceded to, compared to those who leave quietly without stating what can be done to make them stay.

On a scale of zero ("not angry") to four ("furious"), more than half (53 per cent) the respondents said they are "furious" – the highest level of anger – at the existing situation in the public health care system.

More than a quarter (27 per cent) are "very angry", while 13 per cent are "angry". Only two per cent said they are not angry.

A whopping 83 per cent feel the Government isn't serious about addressing issues in public health care. Dr Zaliha Mustafa, a freshman MP from PKR, is the current Health Minister in the unity government, succeeding Khairy Jamaluddin.

About eight in 10 respondents in Code Blue's survey said they are overworked and underpaid. Nearly three-fourths (74 per cent) said they're burned out, and six in 10 expressed insecurity about their career progression.

After making headlines, a quarter (25 per cent) of respondents said they face workplace bullying, while two per cent said they face sexual harassment at work.

What is interesting about Code Blue's survey findings is the near equal representation of contract and permanent staff, the participation of senior doctors up to the subspecialist level, as well as the (albeit small) representation of pharmacists, dentists, medical assistants, nurses and allied health care workers.

This indicates that workplace frustrations in the public health service, particularly in the MOH, are shared across seniority and profession, not just limited to junior and contract doctors who held a one-day strike in mid-2021.

Malaysia's longstanding failure to invest in public health care infrastructure and workforce – even after Covid-19 highlighted the damaging outcomes of a chronically underfunded health care system – has stretched health care workers to the limit.

The pandemic appears to have exacerbated burnout, workforce shortages and staff turnover, with more people likely sicker after disrupted care from the past three years, though MOH has not released data on patient load and health human resource trends.

Some 17 per cent of respondents wrote verbatim responses on issues that they're facing at work. Their complaints broadly relate to immense work burdens, understaffing, unfair pay, and insufficient amenities and equipment in public health care facilities.

A contract medical officer (MO) working at a public hospital highlighted the discrepancy in pay and perks between existing permanent MOs and those recently appointed into permanent positions. For the latter, their pay grade does not reflect their years of service when they were under contract.

"It starts from zero. Meaning, if you've been a contract MO, say, from 2018 and then you got your permanent post in 2022, you still get the same base pay, and [it] only increases four years after permanent employment. That's eight years of service.

“Why? Do contract officers don’t do the same job? They don’t hold the same responsibilities? Why the discrimination between years of service? Work is work,” the MO wrote.

“I am actively seeking employment out of the country. I do not want to keep working and be stuck in a system that doesn’t appreciate the work I do, that does not care for the welfare of officers. And of course, there’s the horrible pay for on-calls, I’m sure you’ve read about it.

“So, if anyone has the opportunity to leave, they will. And when the ministry realises they’ve turned a blind eye for way too long, it’ll be too late,” the MO wrote.

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"Sabah Voices to Action - Shaping Sabah's Future Together" is a citizen-driven, non-partisan initiative running from March to June 2025, dedicated to amplifying Sabahans' voices, fostering meaningful discussions, and shaping policies on education, healthcare, public infrastructure, and good governance.

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Together, we can build a stronger, more inclusive Sabah!



PPH 1/12/2012 (031000) Vol. 06 Kota Kinabalu, Sunday, April 13, 2025 RM1.50 Established 1963

Than be posted to Sabah

When does prefer driving Grab

David Thien
KOTA KINABALU: Sabah has a serious doctor shortage problem with a ratio of one doctor to over 500 patients, the highest in the country. The root of the problem is staffing shortages.

There were doctors who prefer to do other jobs including ones being Grab-drivers than be posted to Sabah because they may be posted to remote locations like Banggi Island where there is no good internet connectivity to stay in touch with their families, who may also discourage them, as the trip involves a long boat ride.

The journey would also be inconvenient, especially if female and pregnant.

There have been cases whereby doctors had to raise funds or look out from their own pocket to send poor patients who could not afford to travel to referral hospitals to see specialists or for treatment.

Some drive patients themselves to

the referral hospitals in urban areas. Which is why they "become a fat rat" to come here.

This was revealed by Sabah Medical Association President Daniel Di Christina Randi and Gynaecologist and Obstetrician Dr Felice Huang in a recent 'Sabar-Kopitiam' Cerebral 'Voices to Action' podcast on the current state of healthcare providers in Sabah.

In Malaysia now, every thousand has a chance to select where they prefer to be posted. Seven out of 10, or 10 per cent, may be applicable to come to Sabah, while the rest would sit out the opportunity.

For doctors already serving in Sabah, they find it expensive to fly to attend professional development courses elsewhere, and being over-worked leaves them with little time for reading and keeping updated on medical developments.

On how medical graduates formed negative perceptions about serving in Sabah they said it was

through the media postings by those working in Sabah. Many wanted to quit. The report on the recent suicide controversy of a doctor in Lahad Datu didn't help the situation.

"Sabah is a big area, almost half of West Malaysia's land size. Decision makers on health matters based in West Malaysia may not have a good geographical knowledge of the state to appreciate the scope of the issues that Sabah faces and the solutions needed to overcome problems," said Dr Randi headed the State medical services and opted for early retirement.

Reference was made to the nationwide Code Blue Survey published in 2021 about the feedback from healthcare players which included doctors from Sabah. Some 90 per cent of the feedback, against Malaysia's Public Health Care System in crisis.

More tomorrow



Former State Medical Director Randi (right) and Felice Huang (left) speaking to the press.



Online survey showed many doctors want to quit

CODE BLUE Survey published in 2021, Code Blue's online survey titled "Observation among Health Professionals in Sabah and Malacca in Malaysia's Government Health Service", was conducted from Jan to Feb 2021.

The survey among government doctors, pharmacists, dentists, medical assistants, nurses and allied health care workers nationwide, showed more than half are willing to go on strike, while more than a third are thinking of quitting government healthcare professionals in Malaysia nationwide, not just doctors, are reporting high levels of anger and dissatisfaction at the situation in the public health care system.

Even though Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim administration appears to have health as a top priority, a whopping 65 per cent of the poll believe that Malaysia's public health care system is in crisis.

A startling 73 per cent of respondents said they're thinking about quitting the government health service. Over half (50 per cent) said they would take part in a strike if one was organised for public health care workers, while a third (30 per cent) expressed uncertainty about their participation.

For registered, many government health care professionals are either willing to go on strike or stand up for their industrial action.

The fact that more respondents are willing to quit rather than to go on strike shows potential challenges for the Government to retain public health care professionals. Industrial action means that workers may remain at the service if they then decide not to, compared to those who have quietly walked out, what can be done to make their stay.

On a scale of one (not angry) to five (extremely), more than half (53 per cent) the respondents said they are "extremely" angry about the state of the public health care system.

More than a quarter (20 per cent) are "very angry", while 9 per cent are "angry". Only two per cent said they are not angry.

A whopping 85 per cent feel the Government isn't serious about addressing issues in public health care. Dr Zakki Mustafa, a health care MP from POK, is the current Health Minister in the very government, succeeding Khairul Johari.

About eight in 10 respondents in Code Blue's survey said they are overworked and underpaid. Nearly three-fourths (74 per cent) said they're burned out, and 16 per cent reported increasing their current progression.

After making headlines, a quarter (25 per cent) of respondents said they face workplace bullying, while two per cent said they face sexual harassment at work.

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Rising costs set to push up property prices

KEVIN KUNAMILL

Property prices in Sabah are set to increase by up to 10 per cent in the second quarter of this year due to a surge in construction materials.

Sabah Housing and Town Development Authority Chairman Datuk Mustapha Mustapha (right) said his materials like cement, brick, steel and

steel have seen price hikes since January and added that developers can consider adjusting prices to offset costs.

"According to early year data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia, cement prices have increased by 10 per cent by age, brick by age and timber by age," he said.

Sabah's property market, already facing high prices, is expected to rise further due to material costs and global supply chain issues.

"Transport and logistic costs, espe-

cially the state shipping prices at Port Moresby, are pushing Sabah, also add pressure," he said.

The Housing Authority was called by just efforts by government agencies, developers, suppliers and buyers to find solutions.

"One step is government subsidies for materials with price hikes to stabilise short-term prices."

"Another option is price ceilings on

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10,000 attend Hajji's open house



R. Gonzalez

Some 10,000 people gathered Saturday at Dewan Sri Sulaiman, Tawau, to celebrate Hajji's 80th birthday at the Hajji's Open House, featuring Hajji's family, friends and community.

The event also featured a performance by the Tawau Muslim Choir and a presentation of a plaque to Hajji's family.

"The Hajji's Open House is a platform for people of all races and religions to come together in the spirit of celebration," he said.

"I truly appreciate the presence of everyone who made time to attend today. Such presence is a testament to the unity and strength of the Tawau community," he said.

Picture shows Hajji (center) greeting the guests.

PPTN borrowers urged to come forward and discuss

CRYSTAL E. HERNANDEZ

KOTA KINABALU: The Ministry of Higher Education is encouraging borrowers of the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (NHEFC) to reach out directly to the agency to contribute their views.

The Ministry also encourages borrowers to come forward and discuss their views on the NHEFC's policies and procedures.

"We are not here to punish anyone, but to listen to your views and concerns," he said.

"The Ministry is conducting a periodic and broader engagement exercise," he said.

During the Hajji's Open House, Hajji's family and friends were also present.

Mustapha said approximately 10 per cent of PPTN borrowers have never made a single payment, while the remaining majority - through often irregular - are still making efforts to pay.

He stressed that the Ministry is ready to support a 10 per cent discount through open communication.

"Our focus is on this 10 per cent. Don't be afraid to come forward and discuss."

aided - come and talk to us. There's no fear of judgement and retaliation," he said.

The Ministry, he added, welcomes the higher education borrowers to come forward to discuss their views on the NHEFC's policies and procedures.

Mustapha also highlighted ongoing efforts to support borrowers, including the NHEFC's financial assistance, scheduled to take place in Sabah on April 19-20 and at Universiti Malaysia Sabah on May 10-11.

These events are designed to help borrowers, particularly from underprivileged backgrounds, explore higher education opportunities.

"I stress this opportunity. Act immediately, call, Ministry office number, meet for Hajji's children, as we hope these to Sabah take this chance to get the information they need," he said.

In addition, Mustapha, who is also Deputy Minister, announced the soft launch of the Sepanggar Development Plan during the event.

He described it as the first step in formulating a comprehensive strategy for high physical and human development in the constituency.

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Opposition won't be silent, says Bung

KEVIN KUNAMILL

Datuk Seri Bung Mokhtarr said the people's voice, civil disobedience, and non-violent resistance in response to major issues currently affecting the state and nation.

Speaking ahead of the State Legislative Assembly (SLA) sitting, Monday, Bung, who is facing a suspension, said the opposition is not merely reacting.

"It is likely to be the final sitting before the SLA is dissolved to pave the way for the next state elections."

"This sitting must not be used as a platform to stage political manoeuvres or to stage a political performance. Instead, it should be used as the most appropriate forum for

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