

When docs prefer driving Grab, than be posted to Sabah

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Kota Kinabalu: Sabah has a serious doctor shortage problem with a ratio of one doctor to over 700 patients, the highest in the country. The root of the problem is staffing shortage.

There were doctors who prefer to do other jobs including even 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 fork 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 bit scary to come here.”

This was revealed by Sabah Medical Association President Datuk Dr Christina Rundi and Gynaecologist and Obstetrician Dr Felice Huang in a recent Sabar-Kopitiam Council “Voices to Action” podcast on the current state of healthcare providers in Sabah.

In Malaysia now, every Houseman has a chance to select where they prefer to be posted. Seven out of 70, or 10 per cent, may be agreeable 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 overworked 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 state, 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 Rundi headed the State medical services and opted for early retirement.

Reference was made to the nationwide Code Blue Survey published in 2023 about the feedback from healthcare players which included doctors from Sabah.

Some 90 per cent of the feedback opined that Malaysia’s Public Health Care System is in crisis.

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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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