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New lifeline for public health

Amendments will spur on young doctors seeking specialist training

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GEORGE TOWN: Medical specialists have lauded the move to amend the Medical Act 1971 (Act 50), which will help to raise the number of critically needed medical specialists, especially in government hospitals.

Malaysian Association for Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery (MATCVS) president Datuk Dr Basheer Ahamed Abdul Kareem (*pic*) said this will benefit young doctors eager to enter courses for their career development.

"This will make a world of difference to them.

"It will benefit all our patients waiting for surgery as this does not just encompass cardiothoracic but 14 other specialties.

"We need family medical doctors as well as those who will benefit from the Act," he said.

The Medical (Amendment) Bill 2024, aimed at resolving issues related to the parallel pathway specialist training programme, was tabled by Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad on Monday.

The Bill is scheduled to be tabled for the second reading in the current Dewan Rakyat meeting, which concludes tomorrow.

Dr Basheer Ahamed said the



amendments are significant as the Health Ministry, which has been training specialists for the last 50 years, will be officially listed as a training institution.

"This is timely; the Act will now recognise the Health Ministry as a training partner.

"Interestingly, this has been the case for 50 to 60 years but now, it will be legally acknowledged.

"It's about time it (Health Ministry) received some recognition for its training of specialists in the country.

"With the 146 hospitals, 46,000 beds and 9,000 specialists, their capacity to train is unparalleled," he said.

Dr Basheer Ahamed said the amended Act will guarantee the smooth running of the Masters programme.

"It will even empower the

Malaysian Medical Council (MMC) to fully conduct exercises and recognise these qualifications and have governance to ensure the safety of all.

"I am grateful to the Health Minister for putting the people's health ahead of the interests of certain groups.

"He (Dzulkefly) is steadfast and committed to using all the government machinery to do something good for young doctors," he said.

Dr Basheer Ahamed hopes MPs will join efforts in making it a successful crusade for the sake of healthcare improvement in the country.

"I hope Parliament will give its full support to the amendments," he added.

Meanwhile, the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (FRCSEd) for cardiothoracic surgery, which was previously not recognised by the MMC, has been listed on the Fourth Schedule of the Medical Act's amendment Bill.

This comes under the list of registrable specialist qualifications.

In March, *The Star* reported that the shortage of cardiothoracic surgeons had left some 1,500 heart and lung disease patients in government hospitals in dire straits.

The proposed amendments

came about after the MMC refused to recognise certain parallel pathway programmes aimed at training cardiothoracic surgeons, even as government hospitals face a critical shortage of such specialists.

Malaysian graduates who had been sent by the government to study cardiothoracic surgery at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (RCSEd) are unable to practise in Malaysia as their qualifications are not accepted by the MMC.

In response, the MMC said it had never recognised the RCSEd programme.

Four of these graduates have already sued the MMC for refusing to register them with the National Specialist Register.

Addressing this, the Bill seeks to improve provisions related to the registration of specialists and the recognition of qualifications and specialised training.

It also proposed changes in the composition of MMC members.

Among substantial amendments made was to Section 14, which is in relation to the registration of a specialist as under the proposed amendment, the phrase "recognised training programme in any recognised training institution" will be replaced with "training programmes in any institution determined by the MMC".