

HEALTHCARE: Compulsory training to safeguard profession

Tuesday, February 23, 2010

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I REFER to the letter by M.B.B.S. Taiping, “They cannot replace doctors” and “In demand” by Datin Hatijah Yusof (NST Feb 9).

While I agree with M.B.B.S Taiping that allied health personnel should not replace doctors, the concept of multidisciplinary collaborative care between doctors and allied health professionals should be embraced, rather than viewed with suspicion.

Having an M.B.B.S. alone is not enough to prove that a medical practitioner is competent to be on the frontline and to lead a multidisciplinary healthcare team.

Only medical doctors with a basic medical degree who do not keep abreast with evidence-based practice would feel insecure or humiliated when they are faced with PhD nurses. It is high time that the medical professionals themselves move forward to obtain postgraduate qualifications in various fields.

New graduates with basic medical degrees should be barred from opening private primary care practice, as there are already in excess of 7,000 private general practice clinics throughout the country.

The quality and standard of primary care practice in Malaysia can be better safeguarded if there is a requirement for compulsory basic entry training, such as the Diploma in Family Medicine run by the Academy of Family Physicians Malaysia.

The vision, of course, is to have all primary care physicians in Malaysia holding specialist qualifications in primary care. The two that are available in Malaysia are the Masters of Family Medicine, offered by three public universities, and the conjoint Fellowship of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners/Membership of the Academy of Family Physicians Malaysia.

Having been trained in primary care in the UK, I can also vouch for the statement made by Hatijah , that nurse practitioners and other allied health team members work side-by-

side with primary care physicians in almost every aspect of care.

While we can see that this is already happening in the public primary care clinics in Malaysia, the role of nurses should be upgraded even more through proper training, further qualifications and better remuneration.

Evidence from developed countries has proven that if nurse practitioners are properly trained to screen for red flag symptoms and triaging, they can manage acute minor ailments safely and competently.

Robust scientific evidence from around the world has also shown that having a multidisciplinary care team led by a competent primary care physician is pivotal in improving the outcome in caring for chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, asthma etc.

The country is in dire need of more specialist doctors, specialist nurses and allied healthcare professionals to improve the quality of medical care. There has to be mutual trust and respect among all parties involved. With the nurses and other allied health professionals striving to be better qualified, having M.B.B.S. alone is not quite enough for the medical practitioners to lead this noble profession.