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1GPs

Time To Unite Under 1MMA

"It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a ripple of hope".

~ Robert Francis Kennedy quotes (U.S. attorney general and adviser, 1925-1968)

In my previous article I wrote about the 1Care Clinics - Primary Health Care (PHC) System in our country and the issues related to this new system of healthcare.

One of the features of the PHC is that the "PHC physicians should be independently established and self-employed. They must be trained and accredited". Where is the justice in this statement? After spending five to eight years working as housemen and training in government hospitals and in some cases even more years, how can we say that these doctors are not "trained"! If this is so then the whole system needs a change and all medical personnel not doctors alone, must be re-trained. The Private Health Care Facilities and Services Act (PHCFSA) is already in place - so why is there a need to re-accredit or rather duplicate the existing Act and that too at such a high cost. It does not make any sense at all!

The new Medical Act 2010 (as we are told) will be incorporating CPD points before an APC is issued. Isn't this good enough for credentialing doctors? It is not fair to put doctors under such tight scrutiny compared to other professionals, i.e. lawyers,

"We come to reason, not to dominate. We do not seek to have our way, but to find a common way."
~ Lyndon B. Johnson

engineers, etc. We are being treated like underdogs and there is no respect for this honourable profession.

Besides the PHCFSA and the new Medical Act 2010, the Malaysian Society for Quality in Health (MSQH) was initially set up to accreditate hospitals only and now, clinics have become their targets as well. A fee will be imposed for the process and must be renewed every four years. Whereas the Academy of Family Physicians of Malaysia (AFPM) has its own programme called the Quality Improvement Programme (QIP). This programme only focuses on the credentialing and privileging process of GPs who wish to be upgraded to Family Medicine Specialists which is a standard requirement under the Human Resource Standard of the MSQH Medical Clinic Standards. I feel that all doctors currently in private practice should be accorded the privilege and be recognised equivalent to Family Medicine Specialists. How much more do GPs need to be accredited to prove their professionalism or worthiness? Even prisoners do not need to go through such a tedious process for parole or rehabilitation? GPs are thought to be worse than them. We have so many enforcement bodies/medical "Police" scrutinising us and watching over us like a hawk. Are the other professions going through the same fate as us doctors? No, not that I am aware of.

If we look at the Medical Clinic Accreditation Standards under the MSQH, everything is already in place to ensure safe medical practice, patient safety and quality service in primary care as well as in the specialists' clinics. These standards cover areas such as access to care, practice, human resource, safety, ethical practice and quality improvement activities. Are not these standards sufficient enough to accreditate clinics/GP practices? Then what is the purpose of having a body such as MSQH with such a redundant role?

All our doctors are well trained and well equipped with knowledge and skills to carry out their medical profession in an ethical and noble manner. There is no such thing as an "untrained" doctor. If a doctor is not qualified or untrained, how can he/she be registered with the MMC? Does this mean that even the MMC is a nullified body in the first place - since "untrained" doctors are practicing in this country and now there is a call to re-train them?

Another feature of the PHC was that "GPs will refer to any hospital as agreed mutually between them, the client and the hospital. Fees will be based on case-mix and will be partially borne by the capitation at rates to be decided by the National Health Financing team and out-of-hours services after 5pm will be provided by groups of PHC physicians and allied health or cooperatives." Who will carry out this enforcement? Where is the regulation for this? What about group practices and those 24-hour clinics? What would their incentives be? This is our bread and butter. Who decides on the incentives and disincentives and what is the yardstick for these?

Besides the rules and regulations, accreditation processes etc., GPs are also bearing the brunt of these by having to bear high costs and also to compete with so many "unregulated practitioners".

There is duplication of accreditation processes and it is time to relook at the existing system and improve it rather than adding on to the regulations in place. I think it is also time for the MOH, MMA, MSQH & AFPM to have a dialogue session and debate all these pressing issues before any system is put in place. As far as I am concerned, my proposal is that there should only be ONE solid and transparent system to oversee and monitor the credentialing of GPs and medical clinics. This system should be operated by an independent body. Otherwise, the PHCFSA which has already been implemented should remain as the Act that governs all doctors and clinics, which we have been objecting to since before its implementation. However, as doctors we are not as obstinate as we seem to be. We have come to a compromise and after all the boo-hoos; the GPs in general have come to accept this Act as part of the system. So, why the need for another Act or system - is it to overrule the current Act?

I urge all GPs to stand united with us in the MMA on this one issue which is going to affect our practices and let us not get "oppressed" any further. We need to make those in authority see our points of view and problems and not succumb or bow down to these rules and regulations each time it is thrown at our faces. Let us fight for our rights, let us stand as '1GPs'. A sincere call to all GPs (who still shy away to become members of the MMA) to unite under one umbrella to make ourselves more effective. M

"In union there is strength"
~Aesop