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Big pay rise after housemanship

By Annie Freeda

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PUTRAJAYA: The two-year compulsory housemanship for doctors now comes with a reward. Effective Jan 1, those who complete their two-year housemanship will be automatically promoted from UD41 to UD44.

This means they will be taking home RM5,944.25, including allowances, compared with their present salary of RM3,768.39 with allowances.

The move will cost the government some RM1.7 million a year.

Health Ministry director-general Tan Sri Dr Ismail Merican said some 2,000 housemen who began service on Jan 1 would benefit from the new scheme.

Normally, doctors who complete their housemanship have to wait for six to eight years before they are promoted to UD44.

As for the some 7,000 doctors who are still in UD41, Dr Ismail said they would be promoted to UD44 with higher salaries, which would cost the government another RM9.8 million annually.

The government had approved the measure late last year, he said, but it was only finalised recently.

"Medical students were upset that they must serve a two-year compulsory housemanship upon graduation.

"But we had our reasons for implementing this."

The ministry's main aim was to improve the quality and competency of medical officers, especially their clinical skills.

He said the move was consistent with the Cabinet's decision, on Nov 21 last year, to increase the housemanship period from one year to two.

Dr Ismail said there were complaints about medical officers with a one-year housemanship. "Their standard of care was not up to mark."

Furthermore, he added, five per cent of the medical officers who underwent the one-year housemanship could not be registered as they did not fulfil relevant criteria.

"These doctors took a longer time to be registered," he said, adding that many who got through also felt ill-equipped when they were posted to rural areas.

"They had no confidence. With the two-year housemanship, doctors are exposed to a wide variety of cases, procedures and their clinical skills are enhanced."

Dr Ismail said specialists had been told to be fair, firm and strict with housemen and ensure that their training was structured and evaluated fairly.

He also pointed out that the ministry gave fair opportunities to all races where promotion was concerned.

Citing an example, he said, there were 2,085 specialists in government hospitals. Of these, 1,136 are Malays, 480 Chinese, 392 Indians and 21 from other races.

He added 55 per cent of the Malay specialists were in UD48, Chinese 23 per cent and Indians 18.2 per cent, while there were 58 per cent Malays, 21 per cent Chinese and 16 per cent Indians in UD54.

As for Special Grade C, Dr Ismail said 51.5 per cent were Malays, while 24 per cent were both Chinese and Indians.

"We encourage more Chinese and Indians doctors to specialise in family medicine."

Chinese and Indian doctors are seen mainly in internal medicine, general surgery, cardiology, paediatrics and obstetrics and gynaecology.