

3 April 2008

**PRESS STATEMENT
ON
“GOVERNMENT FUNDS FOR CHILD HEART SURGERY IN INDIA”**

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) receives the announcement by the Minister of Health planning to send patients to India for heart surgery with mixed feelings. It is more than twenty five years since heart surgery was started in this country. Initially one or two hospitals were performing heart surgery and currently, there are about twenty hospitals both in the private and public sector performing this surgery.

Prior to this, twenty years ago, we were sending patients to London, Australia, the Philippines and other countries for surgery. It now looks like we are back to square one. Cost has been sighted as the main reason for sending these patients to India. The centers which performs most cardiac surgery in the country are the National Heart Institute, a GLC followed many other universities and government hospitals. The government has to seriously look at costing of the surgeries in these hospital and work out a sustainable package on long term basis.

Sending patients overseas might solve the immediate problem for a while but will be detrimental for the development of a comprehensive cardiac care in this country. The golden opportunity to develop expertise of both doctors and paramedical staff will be lost. More time and effort should have been directed towards developing a comprehensive strategy over the years.

Sending patients overseas is not without its problems. Though the cost of surgery might be relatively low, there are other cost of travel and accommodation of accompanying persons, which should be factored in. Currently, patients coming from rural areas to major towns in Malaysia are already facing many obstacles. Patients who are unfortunate to develop complications will find it stressful to stay in a foreign country for a prolonged period of time. Post surgical follow an important part of surgical care will also be challenging. We only hope this move is not the start of a slippery slope where the government is in the process of outsourcing more of the other specialties.

Malaysia has been working hard to position itself as a health tourism destination. This move of sending our citizens overseas is going to send the wrong signals and hurt these efforts grievously. We view this move of sending patients overseas as a retrogressive step in the development of health care in the country and hope the Ministry will be able to meet the challenges faced in the country in a more innovative manner which will enhance the future development of medicine in this country.

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