



PRESS STATEMENT

MINISTER OF HEALTH MALAYSIA

RESPONSE TO STAR ONLINE ARTICLE WITH THE TITLE "YOU DON'T SEE WHAT WE SEE: A DOCTOR TELLS HIS STORY OF BEING 'SCARED AS HELL' OF COVID-19"

Ministry of Health (MOH) would like to refer to the online article in the Star dated on 26th January 2021 at 4.47 pm on a doctor's open letter titled "You don't see what we see: A doctor tells his story of being 'scared as hell' of COVID-19".

On 26th January 2021, Malaysia reported 3,585 new cases of COVID-19 with a cumulative of 190,434 cases. Out of this cumulative number of COVID-19 cases, a total of 77,424 cases (40.7%) were reported in January 2021 alone. Despite the overwhelming number of cases, case investigation and contact tracing for close contacts of these positive COVID-19 cases were not jeopardised although it may have taken a longer time than usual for the health care workers to engage with these patients and contacts.

Concurrently, MOH is continuously looking at strategies to manage the increasing number of cases. Among the steps taken are to:- increase bed capacity including conversion of MOH hospitals to full COVID-19 or hybrid COVID-19 hospitals; increase the number of Low Risk COVID-19 Treatment and Quarantine Centres (PKRC); introduce home isolation and home monitoring for category 1 (asymptomatic) and category 2 (mildly symptomatic) patients; and engaging private hospitals to manage COVID-19 patients.

In addition, our primary care services have set up COVID-19 Assessment Centres (CACs) in every district to assess COVID-19 patients for suitability of home isolation and home monitoring. We have also engaged with general practitioners in assisting MOH with the assessment of patients and giving health education on home isolation and monitoring.

MOH is also constantly increasing the laboratory capacity to detect COVID-19 patients early by engaging other agencies, universities and private laboratories to perform reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) and antigen rapid test kit (RTK Ag) testing.

Despite the situation of understaffed and overworked public health care providers especially in Klang Valley, MOH strives to overcome this situation in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 3,617 health personnel have been mobilized from MOH (2,874), individual volunteers (272), NGO (250), Armed Forces (207) and other agencies (30) since 2020. MOH has also requested for additional staffing and training of existing staff to handle more responsibilities.

In facing health care workers with burnout symptoms and emotionally affected, MOH has taken the initiative to set up the Psychosocial Support Helpline at national and state level. MOH also collaborates with other relevant Government agencies and Non-Governmental Organization in these activities. In addition, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Teams are also mobilised at hospitals and health facilities to provide Psychological First Aid (PFA) to health care workers and front-liners in need.

In response to this article, the Johor State Health Department (JSHD), in line with MOH strategies in reducing congestion and the enormous usage of beds in government hospitals, has implemented the following:

1. Establish 10 CACs including Bukit Indah Health Clinic which started operating on 10th January 2021 for the purpose of evaluating and screening positive COVID-19 patients before admission to the hospital and whether they are suitable for quarantine at home. A mobile CAC has also been created to deal with the situation in the industry sector.
2. Engage private hospitals in the state of Johor for treatment of COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients. As of 26th January 2021, 15 private hospitals have committed to dedicating 206 beds in the wards and 8 beds in the Intensive Care Units for COVID-19 patients. Apart from that, these private facilities are also ready to accept non-COVID-19 patient referrals to reduce congestion in government hospitals.
3. Continue to increase capacity of COVID-19 beds in general wards and Intensive Care Units of government hospitals throughout the state.

MOH implores the public, employers and individuals, to assist in identifying close contacts in their localities for early action by the nearest District Health Office. MOH will continue to work with all government and non-government agencies to manage this pandemic. We would like to urge all Malaysians to comply with all the health advice given and adhere to all SOPs outlined by the government, such as practice 3Ws (Wash, Wear and Warn) and avoid 3Cs (Crowded places, Confined spaces and Close conversation).

Together, we can bring down the number of COVID-19 cases to protect our loved ones and ease the burden faced by our health care workers.

Thank you.

YB DATO' SRI DR. ADHAM BIN BABA

Minister of Health Malaysia

28 January 2021