



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

Websites:  
(in English, BM, Chinese,  
& Tamil)  
www.consumer.org.my

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia  
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109  
email: consumerofpenang@gmail.com

Letter to the Editor

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## **CAP: Doctors and strike action are morally unjustifiable**

CAP is concerned that a group of 8,000 contract doctors currently serving with the Ministry of Health have threatened mass resignations and a nationwide 'strike' next month. An account known as "*Mogok Doktor Malaysia*" (Malaysian Doctors on Strike) has since emerged on social media.

According to media reports the group's demands include the absorption of all contract Medical Officers (MO) into permanent positions without any conditions or interviews; increment of basic salary and on-call rate; and resolution for the shortage of specialists, MO and house officers.

They also wanted the compulsory service term for medical officers to be reduced automatically to three years without application; reduce on-call and work hours for MOs and house officers; and on-call hours should not exceed six times a month and work hours not more than 60 hours a week.

Meanwhile the government has promised to look into the matter. From time to time the government has responded to and acted on the issues raised and the requests of healthcare workers, assuring all grievances will be looked into, and subsequently, resolved based on the country's economic capabilities.

The issues pertaining to the demands of the contract doctors are complicated as such it will take some time to solve it. Given the promise by the present government that they will solve the problem, contract doctors should give some time for the issues to be resolved. They should not take a hasty decision like threatening mass resignations and a nationwide strike.

Contract doctors should take into consideration that it is estimated that more than 70 per cent of the Malaysian population, do not have any means of supplementary financial coverage for medical treatment, other than the existing tax-funded health care coverage provided by the government.

For patients, the strike will create a lot of problems such as work-loss (if employed), wasted money for transport, treatment delays, prolongation of suffering, irreversible damage to health, dangerous drug interruptions and death.

Besides, the strike breaches the implicit social contract between doctors and patients and negates the doctor's publicly declared declarations of service, codes and principles of ethics.

The strike would affect the weakest and most vulnerable segments of the population such as senior citizens and young children. Therefore is it ethical for doctors to resort to strike for material gain?

In the practice of medicine doctors are placed in the proximity of intimate human emotions, the fragilities, strengths and weaknesses of patients in life and death. As witnesses to such powerful situations, the image of the doctor as the key figure in what has been termed a healing relationship runs the risk of being tarnished in cases of a strike by doctors. The vision of doctors as selfless healers would be de-mystified.

**Mohideen Abdul Kader**  
**President**  
**Consumers Association of Penang**