

# Fair price, please

► 'Stakeholders must act to ensure patients are not over-charged'

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**PETALING JAYA:** To protect patients, action should be taken to stop the indiscriminate increase of the cost of medication.

It is imperative for all stakeholders to agree to strike a balance between the needs of patients and the bottom line for suppliers and retailers, according to the Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society.

Its president, Amrahi Buang, said while it is not within the powers of the government to dictate prices, it could play its role by calling for a special meeting among all stakeholders to agree on pricing for drugs.

He told *theSun* yesterday that the stakeholders - from suppliers to users - could agree on a plan of action to set a reasonable price for drugs, especially in times of crisis.

He was responding to complaints that

prices of vaccines have almost doubled since the outbreak of influenza last month.

To date, a total of 1,097 cases have been detected, and there has been one death so far.

Selangor remains the most badly affected state, with 717 infections already diagnosed, followed by Penang with 178 cases.

Other states affected are Johor with 89, Perak with 79 cases and Negri Sembilan with 34.

In the past several weeks, the price of vaccines has risen from RM60 to RM70 a dose to as high as RM110 to RM120.

Amrahi proposed that the Health Ministry could either work together with the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry to get suppliers to reduce prices, or bring the matter up in the Cabinet.

He also stressed that hospitals or clinics must be required to provide details of all the drugs that patients have been charged for.

"Itemised billing is a must so patients know exactly how much they are paying for the vaccine.

"The bill you receive must be like a grocery shopping receipt, with all the items and the price of each item stated," he said.

He noted that the standard practice now is to bundle all medication into a single receipt so patients are not able to tell how much they are paying for each item.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr N. Ganabaskaran said the cost of the influenza vaccine varied from one locality to another.

He refuted allegations that doctors were raising prices unreasonably.

"We always maintain fair prices, and for the flu vaccine, it is between RM50 and RM70 depending on whether you are in an urban or rural area," he told *theSun*.

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## Healthcare providers urged to stop profiteering

He said pricing also depended on how much suppliers charged the clinics.

A tweet on the prices of flu vaccines sent last Saturday by Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad drew vast response on social media, with many complaining that clinics were overcharging.

A tweet by @Syamsul\_azuar stated that while it was important to get vaccinated, the demand had also led to some clinics

hiking prices.

Dzulkefly, who was at the Antibiotic Fun Run 2020 in Serdang yesterday, said it was not within the powers of the government to put a ceiling price on drugs.

However, he urged doctors to ensure that they charged a fair price.

"I plead for all healthcare providers to stop profiteering in this difficult times. We are in this together to help care for the

people," he said.

The country is expected to see a new supply of about 200,000 doses of the vaccine soon to meet the high demand.

Dzulkefly said 16,800 doses had already arrived yesterday, with another 15,000 doses expected today.

"Over and above that, there will be another batch of 67,000 doses come Jan 27, bringing the total to close to 100,000 doses this month."

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