HEALTHCARE FOR ALL, OR ONLY FOR THOSE WHO CAN AFFORD IT?

DRsForAll call for urgent action to ensure that postcode, poverty and purchasing power do not determine who gets the healthcare they need.

DRsForAll Outreach Clinic in Ulu Jelai, Pahang

KUALA LUMPUR, 8th October 2026 — With the 12th anniversary of Malaysia Doctors' Day 2026 around the corner, the DRsForAll arm of the Federation of Private Medical Practitioners' Associations Malaysia (FPMPAM) is calling for a comprehensive national conversation on a fundamental question:

Can we still say that healthcare in Malaysia is truly accessible to everyone?

Is there really universal coverage in practice?

Is there ease of physical access?

Is there equity and equality in healthcare?

For decades, Malaysia has rightly been proud of building a healthcare system that provides broad affordable with universal access to its population. Yet, beneath that achievement, significant gaps remain.

For families living in remote communities in Sabah and Sarawak, Orang Asli villages and other underserved areas of Peninsular Malaysia, healthcare can still mean travelling for hours by road, river or other difficult routes. For the urban poor, the problem may be different but equally real — rising living costs, transport expenses, waiting times and the increasing cost of private healthcare can make seeking timely medical attention a difficult choice.

"Healthcare must never become a privilege determined by postcode or purchasing power. The true test of our healthcare system is not how well it serves those who can afford the best, but how well it protects those who have the least."

There is another emerging challenge.

The growing commercialisation of healthcare

We recognise the important contribution of responsible private investment, innovation and technology to healthcare. However, the increasing trend of oligopolistic corporatisation and commercialisation of healthcare — involving large local and foreign business interests — needs to be carefully monitored and regulated.

Healthcare is fundamentally different from ordinary commercial commodities.

When commercial considerations increasingly influence where services are provided, what services are prioritised and what patients ultimately have to pay, there is a real risk that the needs of commercially attractive populations will receive greater attention than the needs of vulnerable communities.

Malaysia must not allow the pursuit of efficiency and profitability to come at the expense of equity, equality, professional independence, compassion and the social contract of the doctor–patient relationship.

The current national debate over medical inflation and private healthcare costs demonstrates that this is no longer an abstract concern. Government, insurers, healthcare providers and other stakeholders are already grappling with the affordability challenge.

DRsForAll: doctors going where the need is

DrsForAll have never believed that doctors should wait for perfect solutions before helping those who need them.

Established by FPMPAM in 2016, we have sought to bring medical outreach to communities that conventional healthcare delivery can struggle to reach. It represents the profession's commitment to service beyond the walls of clinics and hospitals. We continue to maintain outreach programmes as part of its wider commitment to community healthcare.

But voluntary medical outreach, however meaningful, cannot substitute for a sustainable national healthcare strategy.

A message to Parliament and the public

With a General Election looming, DRsForAll urges Malaysians to make healthcare accessibility an issue that matters at every election and in every constituency.

Ask your MP. Ask policymakers. Ask those in the corridors of power:

How will we keep healthcare affordable?

How will we reach Malaysians living beyond the end of the road?

How will we protect the urban poor from escalating healthcare costs?

How will we ensure that commercialisation does not widen the gap between those who can pay and those who cannot?

And most importantly:

How do we preserve a healthcare system in which every Malaysian can receive compassionate and appropriate care where and when they need it?

"We cannot simply celebrate having one of the world's better healthcare systems while accepting that some Malaysians remain unable to access it easily, affordably or in time. Universal healthcare is not a slogan. It is a promise that must be continuously renewed and delivered, especially for those who have the least voice and the fewest choices."

We call on Government, the medical profession, civil society, businesses and the Malaysian public to work together to protect one of our nation's greatest social achievements.

Healthcare must remain accessible.
Healthcare must remain affordable.
Healthcare must remain compassionate.
Healthcare must remain for ALL.

As health is a basic right (Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Dr. Steven KW Chow,
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Immediate Past President, FPMPAM