

MALAYSIA LOSING NURSES WITH DEGREE DUE TO LOW PAY

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Kamarlin (third left) at the launching ceremony with Dr D. Kamarudin (second left) and Dr Zabidah (left).

KOTA KINABALU: Malaysia is losing her highly qualified nurses due to low pay.

“Nurses are struggling to get pay that commensurates with the educational qualifications and a new nursing graduate holding a degree will get the same pay as a diploma holder in Malaysia,” said Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) Head of Nursing Department Associate Professor Dr Zabidah Putit when interviewed by members of the media at the nursing conference held at the Promenade Hotel near here, yesterday.

She said the nursing profession was not given the same importance as doctors and engineers, who are given salaries that commensurate with their educational qualifications the moment they graduate.

So instead of getting paid according to their educational qualification, they are only paid salaries that are equivalent to the wage of a diploma holder even though they hold a degree, she said.

In Malaysia, this means a salary of less than RM2,000 a month, excluding monthly allowances, she said.

Engineers, on the other hand, can get over RM2,500 per month with a degree qualification.

“As a result, our nurses holding degree qualifications often opt to work outside the country such as Singapore, Brunei and even Saudi Arabia because these countries pay them according to their qualification. At the same time, the higher rate of exchange also plays a role in attracting them. More than half of our highly qualified nurses work in Singapore,” she said.

She stressed that in order to keep these quality nurses, the country must start providing pay that commensurates with the nurses’ education level.

One of the reasons that probably attributed to the low pay given to nurses with degree qualification is the oversupply of nurses several years ago.

“Presently, the ratio is one nurse for every 200 population. That is currently not that bad but I disagree that there is an oversupply of nurses in the country,” she said.

She added that there were presently 193,000 nurses in Malaysia, with 10 to 20 percent holding degree qualifications and a small number with masters or PhDs. There are also nine public universities offering nursing programmes to their students.

The bulk of the nurses are diploma holders, she said.

“Quality nurses are still short of supply in Malaysia and we need to move forward. Even developing countries such as Thailand and the Philippines are ahead of us in this regard as their nurses are degree holders. It has been like this for 100 years in Thailand,” she said.

Dr Zabidah also mentioned that the quality of nursing graduates from public universities such as Unimas were sought after by overseas health service providers for their quality.

“Singapore recognises our Unimas graduates. Some of them work also in Saudi Arabia where they can command between RM7,000 and RM8,000 a month,” she said.

She added that due to the huge demand for quality nurses outside the country, universities such as Unimas would continue providing nursing programmes and fight to have more nurses that have at least a degree qualification in their hand, despite the lack of recognition (salary wise) from the Health Ministry for nurses with such credentials.

“We cannot wait for the ministry to change and we should not withdraw from this challenge (of providing degree programmes for nurses). Nurses with quality are still inadequate in Malaysia ? we plan to move towards nurses with degrees,” she said.

Meanwhile, Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Panglima Masidi Manjun said in his speech which was read by his Assistant Minister Datuk Kamarlin Ombi that nurses were the highest workforce in the healthcare system who render and provide high quality care to fulfil the needs of their patients.

“Nurses, being the single large group of professionals need to fully participate to enhance in reviving and reforming the healthcare system to ensure that policy advocacies significantly make an impact on the health of the people,” he said.

He added that nurses were continuously being challenged by meeting health needs like the rise in lifestyle related chronic conditions, ageing population, and higher expectations for better healthcare services.

Hence, a healthy health system composed of excellent health services, highly trained workforce, highly efficient information system and medical technologies, as well as adequate financing and outstanding governance are seriously needed, he said.

“They are required to deliver quality healthcare to all people when they need it, where they need it, and at prices they can afford,” he said.

He also said in achieving this the resilience among nurses through their personal attributes and social environment are very crucial in order to achieve powerful determinant of resilience.

“Continuous professional education is the key factor to update knowledge and enhance resilience,” he added.

Also present at the event was Professor Dr D. Kamarudin D. Mudin, deputy vice chancellor (Academic and International Division) of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).