

New SOPs to stem hospital staff abuse

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PETALING JAYA — Standard operating procedures (SOPs) and guidelines are being drawn up by the Health Ministry to help medical staff who are abused by unruly patients and family members.

The ministry's medical development director, Datuk Dr Azman Abu Bakar, said it had been working on the matter after receiving an increased number of reports of such bullying this year.

"This has been a problem of late. Medical personnel are increasingly finding themselves in the firing line by either patients or those accompanying them," he said.

"Our first responsibility as caregivers is the life and health of patients. However, abusive behaviour is preventing the personnel from carrying out their duties effectively."

Malay Mail yesterday frontpaged the issue of public hospital staff being worried about the rising incidence of abuse.

This has prompted at least one hospital, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Hospital, to organise an internal forum to educate staff on their legal rights.

Other hospitals had to put up signs warning against such behaviour.

Dr Azman said the SOPs would be designed to protect medical personal and institutions from aggressive patients and family members.

They would also cover legal guidelines on how staff should respond in such situations.

"The ministry has advised hospitals to lodge police reports if a patient became physically violent," he said.

"However, verbal abuse is a highly subjective matter. That is why we need to make the wording specific and detailed to prevent abuse of the SOPs by any party."

He said the ministry would look at policies in other countries as guidelines.

No time-frame has been set.

Dr Azman said the ministry was working on standardised signage to be placed at all government hospitals to caution

those seeking treatment against unruly behaviour.

"We are studying the legal implications of the signage and how best to apply it. Our first concern is always the patients, but this does not mean medical personnel should be vulnerable to abuse," he said.

Dr Azman did not rule out greater cooperation with police, saying the ministry would pursue cases where medical personnel had been physically assaulted.

"If a report was lodged, the investigation needs to be carried out thoroughly until it is concluded," he said.

"If the police decide no further action is necessary, we would like them to justify it."