

'Don't lie to health workers'

DG: Frontliners have families and need to be protected too

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PETALING JAYA: More health experts have come forward to warn patients seeking treatment in healthcare facilities not to lie to frontliners about the status of their exposure to Covid-19, calling it an act of betrayal.

This came following a warning from Health director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah after a doctor shared on Facebook that she had tested positive after being exposed to an infected patient.

"Do not lie to frontliners. We should also be protected, we have family and friends. Do not betray frontliners," Dr Noor Hisham said on Facebook yesterday.

Malaysian Public Health Physicians Association president Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar said patients who did not tell the truth about their history of exposure and contact would obstruct health workers in making proper assessments and diagnoses.

"They may also put staff at risk, especially if staff did not practise

universal precaution or were not extra careful," he said, urging all patients to always reveal their medical history and exposure.

"Healthcare staff should always practise universal precaution when attending to any patient.

"It is safe to assume that the patient is Covid-19 positive until proven otherwise," he said.

In his warning, Dr Noor Hisham shared a Facebook post by a Dr Nur Marini Zainal, who detailed her experience of testing positive after dealing with a patient who had hidden his history of illness during screening before a CT scan appointment.

"A patient came to hospital and was screened at the department's entrance before undergoing a CT scan. The temperature was normal. The patient claimed to be healthy and was allowed to enter.

"I was the doctor who prepared the patient for the scan. I was surprised to see the patient's lungs shown in the CT resembling (that of) a Covid-19 patient," she said.

Dr Nur Marini said the patient then admitted to experiencing

cough and fever for a week but felt well enough to attend the CT scan appointment.

"The patient's action has caused trouble to others. The patient was confirmed positive for Covid-19 two days later," she wrote, adding that she then self-quarantined and later tested positive herself.

Pleading with patients not to lie to healthcare workers if they had experienced any symptom, Dr Nur Marini said their actions would affect other patients, healthcare workers and their families.

"We are also humans," she said. Malaysian Medical Association president Prof Datuk Dr Subramaniam Muniandy cautioned that under Section 12 of the Prevention and Control of Infectious Disease Act 1988, lying to a government official, which could lead to the potential spread of disease, was considered a serious offence as it could lead to a two-year jail sentence.

"Withholding vital information can result in delays in detecting cases of Covid-19," he said, pointing out that this could lead to complica-

tions and even death.

"We wish to remind all healthcare workers to never let their guard down, on and off duty."

Universiti Putra Malaysia medical epidemiologist Assoc Prof Dr Malina Osman said with the current active cases at over 20,000, healthcare staff and frontliners were already burdened with a heavy workload.

"We should understand this situation as they also have to provide healthcare services to other non-Covid-19 patients," she said.

Healthcare workers, said Dr Malina, must protect themselves from being infected to prevent shortage of staff.

"In healthcare facilities, the personal protective suit is set based on risk assessment," she said.

If patients did not declare the truth, health workers would only use minimum protective attire and thus exposed themselves to infection to other staff and vulnerable groups in hospital, she said.

Not declaring one's health status, she added, was a betrayal to the healthcare staff and other patients.