

Health ministry faces heat over lack of perks for volunteers

By Jason Thomas - June 1, 2021 9:23 AM

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The health ministry's poster uploaded onto its social media platforms on May 27.

PETALING JAYA: The health ministry has come under criticism for not offering any perks for volunteers wanting to help fight the Covid-19 pandemic, although allocations for volunteers have been announced by another ministry.

A poster on the health ministry's social media platforms last week called for volunteers such as medical officers and nurses but said it would not provide transport, accommodation, food or allowances.

"All costs during volunteer service are borne by yourself," said the poster.

Former deputy health minister Dr Lee Boon Chye said, however, that the science, technology and innovation ministry (Mosti) had said in April that the national immunisation programme had allocated RM200 million for gifts to non-health volunteers and RM147 million for health volunteers' allowance.

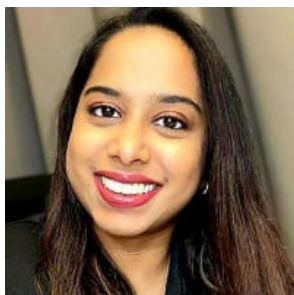
"I read the health ministry's notice and I thought it was fake news, because this is totally unrealistic. It's a joke if it's real," he said.

He said there was no need to call for volunteers because there was "so much excess human resources" at other ministries and even local councils.

Lee said the prime minister only had to issue a directive for each ministry to spare "maybe 5% to 10%" of their staff to the health ministry or Mosti to help with vaccinations. These civil servants could carry out administrative work, man call centres or carry out registration.

Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Subramaniam Muniandy said allowances for food and travel should be provided "at the very least".

Volunteers should also be vaccinated, he said, as they would be exposed to higher risk of infection.



Dr Thanussha Francis Xavier.

Dr Thanussha Francis Xavier, vice-president of the MUDA party, questioned the lack of budget in the health ministry, which is spearheading the battle against Covid-19.

"This is not an NGO trying to help the underprivileged," she said.

Previous calls for volunteers had required that they be registered with their professional body but last week's notice had no such requirement.

Among the other posts currently needed are dental officers, medical assistants, environmental health assistant officers and medical laboratory technologists.

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