



Patron: His Royal Highness, Sultan of Perak, Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah

ACADEMY OF MEDICINE OF MALAYSIA

2 April 2020

PRESS STATEMENT

Of Women, Professionalism and Doraemon in the time of COVID-19

Malaysia is in the throes of waging war against the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite resource limitations, staff from healthcare, police, military and other services are going above and beyond to keep Malaysians safe. Many of these are women who serve at great personal cost whether they are front-liners, experts or leaders. Others are contributing by Working From Home (WFH), in line with the Movement Control Order (MCO).

It is disappointing, therefore, that the recent posts by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKM), in the form of Public Service Announcements (PSAs) under #WanitaCegahCOVID19, have chosen to ignore this, and reduced women's roles to that of subservient homemakers.

The first, which discouraged women from wearing 'house clothes', while encouraging them to have a full face of make-up on while Working From Home (WFH), sends the message that aesthetics are more valuable than substance. The second, which discouraged rebuke of a non-contributory spouse suggests that women should simply accept poor behaviour. The third, which encouraged communication in a high-pitched tone of voice followed by simpering giggles (ala Doraemon) beggars belief. For a country that aspires to a developed nation status, it is ironic that its women are expected to reduce themselves to behaving and sounding like cartoon characters. The apology that followed contained elements of condescension and failed to correct the perpetuated stereotypes.

A woman's value goes beyond servitude to another, nor is it confined to superficialities. In a marriage, responsibilities should be shared by all members of the family, not inequitably shouldered by one party. Respect and responsibility stand among pillars of leadership, in organisations and in the home. Prevention of speaking naturally and the suppression of one's wit prevent personal growth and development. Adopting an anime persona may suit certain amorous adventures. However, getting your domestic functional points across while hanging laundry does not qualify. Such frivolous advice is unbecoming of a Ministry that purports to champion and support women.

It is crucial that we, as a nation, collectively focus on more important issues, such as those surrounding the pandemic. The Ministry should instead be helping families who are impoverished by the MCO, defending those living with domestic abuse, or supporting those women that are separated from their families in service of their country. Women in Malaysia, principally in the male-dominated fields battle harassment, discrimination and bullying regularly in various forms. Some may not be on the receiving end of the abuse and terror, but bear silent witness, adopting the ostrich approach, fearing retribution if they speak up. Professionalism and regulation relating to this is sorely lacking in Malaysia. As a Ministry with the word Women in its name, we expect better.

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From numerous aspects, this serves as a priceless opportunity to educate everyone on the importance of vigilance in what and how information is conveyed. Those assigned positions of power often fail to comprehend the gravity their positions lend to cursory opinions, however well intentioned. Statements and actions are taken at face value. In this light, all individuals have a role to play in eliminating toxic stereotyping. We strongly encourage the Ministry to reflect on its current direction, to better support Malaysia's aspirations to be a developed nation.

We, the under-signed:

Academy of Medicine of Malaysia (Professor Dr Rosmawati Mohamed, Master)

College of Anaesthesiologists (Dato Dr Jahizah Hassan, President)

College of Dental Specialists (Professor Dato' Dr Lian Chin Boon, President)

College of Emergency Physicians (Dr Ridzuan Dato' Mohd Isa, President)

College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (Dr Michael Samy, President)

College of Ophthalmologists (Dr Nur Fariza Ngah, President)

College of Paediatrics (Professor Dr Thong Meow Keong, President)

College of Pathologists (Professor Dr Cheong Soon Keng, President)

College of Physicians (Dr Letchuman Ramanathan, President)

College of Public Health Medicine (Dato' Indera Dr Sha'ari Ngadiman)

College of Radiology (Dr Amir Fuad Hussain, President)

College of Surgeons (Professor Dr April Camilla Roslani, President)

(The Academy of Medicine of Malaysia, embracing 11 Colleges and 15 Chapters, is a registered body representing all the medical specialists in Malaysia).