

# Making the case for the Malaysian Medical Association-Junior Doctors Network (MMA-JDN): A report and memorandum of the 2022 MMA-JDN International Conference

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## ABSTRACT

The Malaysian Medical Association-Junior Doctors Network (MMA-JDN) was recently formed via constitutional amendments during the 62nd Annual General Meeting of the Malaysian Medical Association held in 2022. MMA-JDN subsequently went on to organise its first international conference held from 4th to 6th November 2022. This paper documents the rationale behind the establishment of this new section in MMA and the timeline of its formation, reports on the aforementioned conference, as well as lays down the future direction of MMA-JDN.

## INTRODUCTION

Junior doctors refer to those within 10 years of their medical graduation and/or currently undergoing postgraduate training. The Junior Doctors Network (JDN) is a branch under the World Medical Association that strives to empower young doctors to work together towards a healthier world through advocacy, education and international collaboration.<sup>1</sup>

## HISTORY OF JUNIOR DOCTORS NETWORK IN MALAYSIA

Locally in Malaysia, the Section Concerning House Officers, Medical Officers and Specialists (SCHOMOS) in the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has been the main body supporting and representing junior doctors since the year 1971. The Malaysian Chapter of JDN was subsequently formed in 2016 under the auspices of SCHOMOS, and its first milestone was the 2018 Penang Declaration Against Workplace Bullying and Harassment.<sup>2</sup> More recently, further steps were undertaken in the 2022 MMA Annual General Meeting to formalise and recognise JDN as an important bloc within the Association itself. The Malaysian Medical Association-Junior Doctors Network (MMA-JDN) was established through constitutional amendments, with a seat guaranteed for an MMA-JDN representative at the National Working Committee (NWC) of SCHOMOS.<sup>3</sup> Further constitutional amendments are planned to replicate these arrangements within the Private Practitioners' Section (PPS) in the MMA.

## JUSTIFYING THE NEED FOR MMA-JDN

The formalisation of MMA-JDN was done in recognition that junior doctors in Malaysia face unique and unusual circumstances, especially with the introduction of contract hiring in the government sector over the past 5 years. This has led to the scenario of an increasing number of junior doctors exiting government service into the private sector.<sup>3,4</sup> Now that a significant proportion of junior doctors are employed in both the government and private sectors (which are separately represented by SCHOMOS and PPS, respectively), there is a need for one common uniting platform for junior doctors to meet and discuss their concerns. These concerns may then be brought forward during NWC meetings for further input from senior doctors and subsequent action. All in all, the establishment of MMA-JDN through constitutional amendments is a strong demonstration of MMA's continued support for junior doctors.

## MMA-JDN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2022

As its first official event, an international MMA-JDN conference was held in conjunction with the 26th Commonwealth Medical Association Triennial Conference and Council Meeting from 4th to 6th November 2022. The theme of the conference was "Empowering Junior Doctors: The Future of Malaysian Healthcare Providers". It saw an attendance of 133 delegates from 14 countries with good representation across the Asian, African, European, Caribbean and North American regions.

After the opening address by the outgoing President of the Commonwealth Medical Association and incumbent President of the World Medical Association, Dr Osahon Enabulele, the conference proceedings were kickstarted with a presentation on the history of SCHOMOS in Malaysia and its ongoing efforts to support junior doctors.<sup>4</sup> This was followed by educational and informative talks about private general practice, pathways to specialisation, research and career progression, in addition to a forum on Best Country Practices in conjunction with our international delegates.

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Before the conference officially drew to a close, a memorandum was presented to commemorate this significant milestone in MMA-JDN's history. It was promptly ratified without amendment by all delegates present.

### 2022 MMA-JDN MEMORANDUM

The participants of the 2022 Malaysian Medical Association-Junior Doctors Network (MMA-JDN) Conference gathered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, made a declaration on 5th November 2022 that:

- 1) Junior doctors are an important bloc within the medical fraternity in their own right, and consequently should be represented adequately in their respective National Medical Associations.
- 2) The vulnerability of junior doctors in the fledging phase of their careers should not be exploited. Instead, they should be treated fairly with proper remuneration and sufficient opportunities for career advancement, without neglecting the importance of self-care and work-life balance.
- 3) Junior doctors themselves must realise that they have a huge role to play in shaping the future of their national healthcare landscape, especially if they are to influence it to reflect their generational values and aspirations. All junior doctors should therefore be actively involved in JDN activities for their collective voices to be heard.
- 4) Likewise, senior doctors have a duty to safeguard the future of their profession by supporting the next generation of junior doctors and inculcating the right values in them.
- 5) All National Medical Associations should nurture Junior Doctor Bodies in their respective countries (with representation at the Junior Doctors Network) to empower them and facilitate advocacy, education and collaboration concerning issues of junior doctors.

### THE FUTURE OF MMA-JDN

Exchanges during this conference revealed that junior doctors across the world continue to share similar issues and pain points of less-than-desirable working hours and environments, unsatisfactory remuneration, and workplace bullying.<sup>1</sup> On the international front, MMA-JDN will actively participate in these ongoing discussions and seek to transcribe best practices found overseas into the Malaysian setting. Locally, MMA-JDN will complement SCHOMOS and value add via activities to support the professional development of our junior doctors.

In addition to implementing such programmes, MMA-JDN will also seek to evaluate ongoing trends in the operational aspects of the practice of medicine in Malaysia, such as manpower mobility and availability, brain drain, workforce allocations and workplace culture. It is hoped that the data generated will serve to produce evidence-based, well-informed policymaking. Given that the practice of medicine is invariably tied to the quality and quantity of human resources,<sup>5,6</sup> its non-academic aspects cannot be overlooked. MMA-JDN will strive to contribute to the advancement of our medical fraternity via a holistic and inclusive approach.

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