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'PRIVATE HOSPITALS AT END OF TETHER'

Sector ready to help government in Covid-19 fight but faces obstacles, says industry group

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PRIVATE hospitals in the Klang Valley have reached their capacity and the capability to assist the public healthcare sector is stretching thin.

Association of Private Hospitals Malaysia president Datuk Dr Kuljit Singh said private hospitals were treating Covid-19 patients, and carrying out testing and vaccinations, as well as tending to non-Covid patients transferred from government hospitals.

"We are shouldering more than what we can now.

"Since January, private hospitals have expanded their capacity and capabilities to cater for Covid-19 patients.

"Previously, we had to wait for the Health Ministry to issue licences before converting Intensive Care Unit beds to Covid-19 beds.

"But now, we have opened up the free beds to admit patients first and notify the ministry later.

"However, private hospitals are also impeded with some challenges.

"Firstly, we do not have additional manpower like public hospitals, which employ housemen and medical officers.

"Many people think private hospitals can simply add beds like hotels and take in Covid-19 patients. It is not that easy.

"Category 4 and 5 patients who are hospitalised require intensive care and around-the-clock monitoring. Private hospitals are



Beds set up in the basement carpark of Tuanku Mizan Armed Forces Hospital in Kuala Lumpur yesterday to treat Covid-19 patients. PIC COURTESY OF ARMED FORCES

short of staff to provide a dedicated support team like that for a large number of patients.

"Secondly, private hospitals are relatively smaller than public hospitals and not all private hospitals are designed to treat infectious diseases.

"Thirdly, patients seeking our services are paying us and we are liable to them.

"So, we cannot simply re-purpose spaces within our vicinity to house as many patients as possible."

Dr Kuljit said private hospitals were willing to mobilise their resources if the government opened more facilities to accommodate Covid-19 patients.

"Private hospitals are also preparing to accept more non-Covid patients from the gov-

ernment as it is more practical to do so.

"A few private hospitals have started this process since last week and more hospitals will follow suit in the next few days."

However, he said the priority

should be to bring down the number of new infections rather than creating more spaces to house Covid-19 patients

"The government must pursue targeted vaccination for vulnerable groups, such as those who cannot work from home."