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Government Doctors'

PAY RISE

A WELCOME MOVE

The newspapers on 28 June carried a welcome piece of news for government doctors, especially the medical officers. The Ministry of Health announced the increase of salaries of doctors in government and restructured hospitals. With effect from 1 July 2000, the average salary increase will be about 25% for MOs, Registrars and Associate Consultants and 19% for Consultants and Senior Consultants.

The increase for MOs is higher with the hope to keep the younger doctors in the public sector longer. This is the second revision of MOs' pay in five years. In October 1996, a new promotional grade was introduced and the night duties allowance was raised. This move was successful as only 15% of MOs who resigned did so within the first 5 years of service, compared to 54% in 1996, before the implementation of the new salary scale, according to MOH. However, despite the pay increment, 75 doctors quit in the first four months of this year, which shows that the salaries are still not competitive. Specialists and trainees will be benchmarked to the private sector specialists' earnings. They can also look forward to higher performance bonuses.

THE TOTAL PACKAGE

The government doctors' pay rise also received attention on air-time on the same day as the announcement in the newspapers. Three doctors were interviewed on Radio 93.8. All three agreed it was a welcome move that recognised the need to have more competitive salaries. The bigger rise for

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medical officers was observed to be a step in the right direction.

Whilst it is the intention of government salaries to be competitive, the end-point can only be the 60-70 percentile of the private pay packet. Other factors are important too. The three doctors pointed out that doctors stay in government service for many other reasons, namely, recognition of their contributions, more training opportunities and career development of the public sector doctors. The total benefits package also needs to address these factors.

The doctors asked by the The Straits Times (29 June 2000) to comment on the pay increase also welcomed it. The general perception is this is definitely a step in the right direction and it will pass on the message that the medical service cares for doctors. Some considered it a nice pat on the back. What was commented was also that money is only part of the equation. Working conditions were considered to be

important. Appreciation of work done was also considered important. Doctors are less likely to leave if they feel their work is appreciated, particularly if the work is onerous. Money is welcome but it should not be forgotten that doctors stay in government service for intrinsic reasons too, like the challenge of being able to serve and to practice in a setting to solve difficult problems.

All the doctors interviewed agreed that the pay rise is unlikely to woo doctors in private practice back to the public sector. But a private practitioner said that two groups of people may be tempted. One group would be general practitioners with struggling practices. Another would be doctors with large medical groups, who see mundane cases but hanker after major medical cases often handled by public hospitals.

We welcome your views on the pay rise. Send your views to news@sma.org.sg. ■



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