

Doctors seek steps to reval

By Faiza Ilyas

KARACHI, Feb 10: Doctors have demanded of the government to take immediate measures to solve the basic issues plaguing the health system for long, saying that the decades-old official apathy has brought the national health system on the verge of collapse.

While expressing concern over the role of the media in portraying doctors in bad light over the recent months, Pakistan Medical Association representatives said medical personnel facing multiple risks to their lives were forced to work in extreme hostile conditions and pointed out that irresponsible reporting, in these circumstances, would only make the

situation worse.

The doctors representing the PMA were talking to a group of journalists at the PMA House on Wednesday.

Referring to some recent media reports in which the doctors had directly been accused of negligence, the PMA representatives said that the journalists didn't bother to make proper investigations and jumped onto conclusions. This attitude had not only brought bad name to the community of doctors but had also put their lives in danger.

"The reporters must talk to the relevant doctors in question and also take into account the circumstances in which medical person-

nel work before flashing a story," PMA President Dr Idrees Adhi said.

He said there was unprecedented security risk being faced by doctors at health facilities, especially at government-run hospitals. "Hospital staff especially at the emergency sections of public sector hospitals frequently faces harassment by attendants. Now, hospitals have also become targets of terrorism. The government must do something about it. Nobody should expect the doctors to perform their best when they are provided the most hostile conditions to work in," he said.

Calling for legislation on quackery, Dr Adhi said one of the

major reasons for public grievances against doctors was the unchecked business of quacks. The problem of quackery was fast eroding health system, but still there was no signs of any government move to curb this business.

The PMA representatives urged the government to set up a medical commission comprising all stakeholders and formulate a policy to revamp the entire health system.

That initiative, they said, must include the issues relating to the doctors' career structure, appropriate salaries, reforms in medical education and structured training during under-graduate and post-graduate medical education both

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at private and public sector institutions.

"Today, the country faces an acute shortage of male doctors. This situation would go worse in coming years given the fact that lady doctors are not available in certain areas for a number of reasons. The main reason for boys' lack of interest in joining this profession and working in Pakistan is low salaries. It's a fact that a driver earns more than a doctor here," Dr Adhi said.

The PMA president expressed regrets over the news that the summary for doctors' promotions had not yet been approved by the chief minister. These promotions had been on the hold for almost

15 to 20 years, he said, adding that thousands of posts of medical personnel were vacant for many years.

In reply to a query, he said that the association had no powers to regulate hospital affairs, adding that the PMA could only urge their administrations to set up a system to keep a check on their daily performances, ensure accountability and to attend to the concerns of patient's family.

"If the media and the public want doctors to perform effectively, they must help put pressure on the government to improve the working conditions for doctors," the PMA representatives said.

They rejected the health re-

forms bill introduced by the Punjab government and demanded that the changes recommended by the PMA Punjab must be incorporated in the same bill.

They also sought complete autonomy for the Pakistan Medical Dental Council, which was responsible for improving medical education and ensuring implementation of medical ethics in Pakistan.

Dr Salamat Kamal, vice-president of the association, Dr Khalil Mukaddam, general secretary, Dr M. Ismail Memon, joint secretary, Dr Shahid Shamim, finance secretary and Dr Syed Furqan Zafar, the editor of a PMA English journal were also present.