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PUBLIC HEALTH

Doctors urge change to draft insurance bill

Power left with new body, fund worries

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Doctors from state and private hospitals gathered yesterday to oppose the draft National Health Insurance bill now before the Senate.

Some 400 doctors said they wanted changes to the bill, which supports the government's 30-baht medical care scheme and universal health coverage policy. They were speaking at a conference at the Medical Association called by an arch critic of the 30-baht health scheme, Chotechuang Chutinathorn.

Senator Kovit Pattakhayon said the bill contained many flaws which could cause serious problems for health.

The bill did not clearly identify people's benefits and entitlements, and left decision-making power with a national health insurance committee.

"How can we be sure that this committee will be reliable, and that people won't be deceived?" said Dr Kovit.

The committee itself was entitled to many privileges, which would invite corruption.

Including the salaries of doctors and health staff in the government subsidy to hospitals would lead to a lack of trust between patients and medical staff.

Patients could come to believe hospitals were more interested in paying staff than providing good services.

Merging health funds such as the 30-baht scheme, the social security scheme and the welfare scheme for civil servants would lead to a monopoly. People would lose their bargaining power in the medical sector.

The bill also imposed penalties on service providers found guilty of malpractice. Doctors would become paranoid and stressful.

Finally, despite a universal coverage principle, certain diseases were still not covered in the bill.

Labour leaders plan a protest against the bill. A gathering of labour bosses at the Labour Ministry yesterday said the bill would affect management of the social security fund.

The group would petition the prime minister, House and Senate speakers.

Rungtham Ladplee, Social Security Fund commissioner, said the government could be tempted to take money from the social security to bail out the troubled 30-baht medical scheme.