

The official Emergency Management Committee statement 240220 of the Korea Interns and Residents Association, released on February 20, 2024

The official Emergency Management Committee statement 240220 of the “Korea Interns and Residents Association” announced on February 20, 2024 was as follows [4] :

We implore the government to retract its flawed policies and cease undemocratic suppression.

In early February, the government unveiled a package of essential healthcare policies and a plan to increase the number of places (admission capacity) at medical schools in Korea by 2,000 from 2025^{a)}. This suite of policies, replete with measures that limit optimal medical care, includes the reform of the payment system that augments the burden on the populace, the prohibition of mixed medical treatments for uninsured items, the introduction of another licenses for medical practice and opening of the private clinics, the extension of the internship period, and the liberalization of the cosmetic market. These policies, of profound significance to the foundation of the Republic of Korea's healthcare system, are outlined in a 19-page document from the Ministry of Health and Welfare, which lists superficial terms without providing substantive content.

The government announced a baffling figure of 2,000 places at medical schools. Despite requests for scientific justification, the government has refused to disclose its evidentiary basis. Professor Yun-Chul Hong of Seoul National University, the author of the data the government cited, has also stated that the size of the increase in medical school admissions should be calculated after rectifying the myriad issues within the medical system. Furthermore, the Korea Association of Medical Colleges (KAMC), a gathering of deans from medical schools nationwide, has acknowledged the submission of an excessive expansion size. The Association has consistently argued that a scientific basis must be established for rationally forecasting doctor numbers. Yet, the government has unveiled a radical medical school quota policy for political gain.

The aversion to essential medical care continues to intensify with each passing year. Merely increasing the number of doctors without first addressing issues like low fees and medical litigation will change nothing. Expanding medical school admissions without addressing the fundamental issues in essential healthcare will increase medical expenses for the populace.

Despite working over 80 hours per week and receiving compensation at the minimum wage level, the government has thus far ignored the residents^{b)}. Reports show that if the residents leave, South Korea's medical system will be paralyzed. We question whether the current hospital structure, which can only operate normally with trainee doctors, is desirable. Has the government, which has condoned this situation until now, had no responsibility whatsoever?

The government proudly proclaims that it has surveilled the contact information of 15,000 residents. It has issued extralegal administrative orders, such

as banning the acceptance of resignations and prohibiting the incitement of collective actions, treating residents as criminals. Consequently, the residents can no longer endure the government's tyranny and have started to resign individually. If the Republic of Korea is a free democratic nation, such extralegal and undemocratic measures should not be taken against anyone, including doctors. The government must ensure the fundamental rights of its citizens.

We demand of the government:

- Completely annul the essential healthcare policy package and the plan to increase the number of places at medical schools by 2,000 a year.
- Establish a body to conduct a scientific forecast of doctor supply and demand and discuss increases and decreases.
- Expand the hiring of specialists in training hospitals.
- Verify the concrete measures to mitigate the legal burden on doctors due to unavoidable medical incidents.
- Improve the harsh training environment for residents, who work up to 80 hours per week.
- Withdraw all unfair orders that intimidate residents and formally apologize to them.
- Fully repeal Article 59 of the Medical Service Act, which infringes upon the fundamental rights of citizens, and comply with the Republic of Korea's Constitution and the International Labour Organization's (ILO) prohibition of forced labor.

We could not idly watch healthcare policies being devised solely for electoral victory. No resident wanted to leave the hospital despite the crumbling training environment. They found joy and fulfillment in seeing their patients' conditions improve, even as they toiled through the night, working more than 80 hours a week. We regret that we must convey the voices of young doctors in this manner. We urge the government to reconsider its current policies promptly and reflect the residents' voices in proposing correct policies.

We hope that tomorrow, we will be able to stand by our patients' sides once more.

a),b) are editor's note. ^{a)}The present number of admission to medical school is 3,058 in 40 institutes. ^{b)}The maximum labor hour for interns and residents is 80 hours except 8 hours for education according to the law from 2016 [5].