

"Emergency Briefing on the Physician Workforce Expansion Plan" announced by the Ministry of Health and Welfare on February 6, 2024

On February 6, 2024, the Ministry of Health and Welfare held the "First Health and Medical Policy Deliberation Committee of 2024" and reported and announced the "Plan to Expand Medical School Admissions Quota," a key initiative for healthcare reform, as follows:

Good afternoon, this is the Minister of Health and Welfare. Today, I will announce the plan to expand the medical school admissions quota discussed at the Health and Medical Policy Deliberation Committee.

With essential healthcare teetering on the brink of crisis, the government is driven by a sense of urgency that this is the final golden opportunity to boldly pursue healthcare reforms that have been previously unattainable. The medical school quota, frozen for 19 years since 2006, will be resolutely expanded to guarantee the people's right to life and health, and to safeguard our hard-earned healthcare system.

On October 26, 2023, the government announced its plan to increase the 2025 academic year's medical school admissions to bolster the physician workforce. Subsequently, we received submissions on expansion demands and educational capacities from 40 universities and completed the verification process, including on-site inspections. Moreover, through last week's public discussion, we explained to the people the 4 essential healthcare policy packages aimed at enabling physicians to dedicate themselves to regional and essential healthcare: 1) expanding the healthcare workforce, 2) strengthening regional healthcare, 3) establishing a safety net for medical accidents, and 4) enhancing fairness in the compensation system.

Throughout this process, the government has engaged in communication over 130 times through various channels with diverse sectors of society, including the medical community. Since January of last year, we have launched a healthcare agenda consultative body with the Korean Medical Association, holding 28 meetings. We have also actively communicated with the hospital community, including the Korean Hospital Association and Specialty Hospital Associations, as well as medical organizations such as the Korea Interns and Residents Association.

In-depth reviews and social discussions have been conducted through the Health and Medical Policy Deliberation Committee and its subcommittees. Additionally, we held a total of 10 regional meetings until last month, allowing us to directly hear the on-site perspectives regarding the essential healthcare crisis facing the regions.

Regarding the scale of physician workforce expansion, allow me to explain. The government determined the increase in the medical school quota based on the projected supply and demand in 2035, 10 years from now. To secure physician staffing levels in medically underserved areas equivalent to the national average,

approximately 5,000 additional physicians are needed. Furthermore, considering the rising healthcare demand driven by rapid aging, among other factors, numerous experts project a shortage of around 10,000 physicians by 2035.

While falling short, the government aims to expand the physician workforce by 10,000 out of the estimated 15,000 by 2035. To achieve this, starting from the 2025 academic year, we will increase the medical school admissions quota by 2,000, raising it from the current 3,058 to 5,058. With an additional 2,000 students admitted annually from 2025, the first batch will graduate in 2031, and by 2035, a maximum of 10,000 new physicians will have been added to the workforce.

The government will periodically review and adjust the physician workforce supply and demand. We will manage the supply rationally, comprehensively considering changes in the healthcare environment, such as aging trends, infectious disease situations, and advancements in medical technology, as well as the people's healthcare utilization patterns.

The allocation of the increased medical school admissions quota to individual universities will be based on the principle of "concentrating on non-capital region medical schools." We will consider various factors, including each university's submitted demand and educational capacity, the need to strengthen the educational capacity of smaller medical schools, and the necessity of supporting regional healthcare. In particular, we plan to ensure that at least 60% of admissions to each non-capital region medical school will be through the regional talent admissions track.

The university-specific admissions quotas for the 2025 academic year will be announced later, following the quota allocation procedures by the Ministry of Education. Today, we will notify the Ministry of Education of the total quota. The Ministry of Education will then proceed with steps such as reconfirming the expansion demands from individual universities, and we will coordinate to ensure no disruptions to the 2025 academic year's university admissions schedule.

Respected citizens, the government will steadfastly carry out healthcare reforms to establish a "regionally self-sufficient healthcare system" that allows all citizens to receive timely medical care in their respective regions.

Our ability to responsibly undertake this long-overdue task after 19 years is entirely due to your keen interest and support. The government will solely focus on the people as we advance these policies.

Esteemed healthcare professionals, the government and the medical community are partners and collaborators, united by the common goal of ensuring the people's lives and health.

Recognizing this as the final opportunity for healthcare reform, the government has been identifying and pursuing reform initiatives across various domains under a sense of urgent crisis. We ask for your cooperation in building this new healthcare system together.

Moving forward, the government will actively communicate with the medical community, refining and advancing our policies. Thank you.