

Society of Government Pharmacists react to NMRA

Here is the statement of the Society of Government Pharmacists titled: ‘Our responses to allegations made by the NMRA management’.

With regard to the NMRA management’s position that a majority of the 23 transferred pharmacists had been seconded on a temporary basis from the Health Ministry, the statement said that all 23 pharmacists were serving in the former CDDA (MTS office) and NDQAL when the NMRA was first established in 2015. None of them was on secondment at the NMRA, but continued to carry on their duties on the request of the then Secretary of the Health Ministry, since they had the knowledge, training, experience and expertise in regulatory work. Their salaries were paid by the ministry and reimbursed by the NMRA.

This was done due to requirements for formal absorption such as Scheme of Recruitment, salary and cadre etc., having to be prepared and approved. Assurances had been given regarding formal absorption as per Section 17.4 of the NMRA Act after receiving the relevant approvals. This section provided the legal basis for such absorption and they had a legitimate right to be absorbed to the NMRA cadre, the statement said.

With regard to the NMRA’s position that despite many discussions over many years, this group of pharmacists had not wanted to join the NMRA as its permanent staff, the statement said that considerable time was taken by the Salaries and Cadre Commission to approve the cadres and salary scales of the pharmacists.

“We had a meeting with the board members on 28.04.2022 and as a result, the then Chairman issued letter No: NMRA/DO3/27/2021 requesting our willingness for the absorption. When we pointed out gaps in the privileges offered by the NMRA with the recommendation of the Department of Management Services as dated 14.06.2021, a Cabinet paper dated 23.05.2017 and the relevant sections of the NMRA Act, a committee under the chairmanship of an Additional Secretary of the Health Ministry was appointed to proceed with the absorption process with relevant recommendations,” the statement said.

It said that the progress of this committee was effectively scuttled by two members from the NMRA. The documents and details requested by the Additional Secretary were not provided. On 24.05.2023, these pharmacists received letter NMRA/D03/27/2023 from the current CEO requesting their willingness to be absorbed, with a deadline of 23.06.2023. They informed their willingness through their lawyer by letter dated 09.06.2023 as there were indications that they would anyway be transferred from the NMRA.

“However, we were issued with letter No: NMRA/D03/17/2023 dated 12.06.2023 from the NMRA Chairman of our release to the Health Ministry. This was done without prior board approval, quoting a letter issued by the Secretary, Health Ministry. However, the Secretary stated that the NMRA had misinterpreted the contents of his letter and issued a clarification to the NMRA, instructing it not to release these pharmacists but to absorb them as per the directives. But the NMRA management ignored that letter,” the statement claims, adding that the pharmacists once again individually informed the NMRA, via registered post, on 22.06.2023 of their willingness to be absorbed.

Taking up the issue that a majority of pharmacists who had been released to the Health Ministry had only diplomas, the statement said that 16 pharmacists among the 23 transferred to the Health

Ministry are B.Pharm degree holders, with experience at the national regulatory body (CDDA and NMRA) being between 12 to 22 years. Two more had law degrees and one a B.Sc and a Master's in nutrition. They have also undergone training in relevant specialties in the regulatory field such as marketing authorization, GMP inspections, GDP inspections, pharmacovigilance, quality risk management, pharmaceutical analysis etc.

It further states that among the 11 pharmacists who are remaining at the NMRA, there are 6 B.Pharm degree holders and 5 diploma holders. Their experience is limited to 4-6 years. It is these pharmacists whom the NMRA Chairman referred to as highly qualified and trained very senior pharmacists.

The statement also rejected the charge that these pharmacists were enjoying the benefits of both the NMRA and the Health Ministry.

With regard to the allegation of a backlog in the registration and licensing process over the past 8-10 years, the statement says that the main reason for it is the dearth of pharmacists and pharmacists being compelled to multi-task. This is while a breakdown of the e-NMRA system caused a backlog of nearly 2,000 applications, which had to be processed manually.

The dossiers assigned to 5 pharmacists who were transferred on disciplinary grounds were reallocated among the remaining pharmacists. Another 3 pharmacists and 2 junior pharmaceutical assessors had gone abroad recently and their dossiers were also reallocated, the statement added.