



MINISTRY OF HEALTH
SINGAPORE



MINISTRY OF
MANPOWER

P R E S S R E L E A S E

5 July 2020

JOINT MOM-MOH STATEMENT ON THE ISSUANCE OF CORRECTION DIRECTIONS UNDER THE PROTECTION FROM ONLINE FALSEHOODS AND MANIPULATION ACT (POFMA) AGAINST NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE SOCIETY (NUSS), THE ONLINE CITIZEN ASIA (TOC), CNA AND NEW NARATIF

Introduction

The Alternate Authority for the Minister for Manpower has instructed POFMA Office to issue five Correction Directions¹ (CD) to the following:

- Video “NUSS Pre-General Election Forum 2020”, published by NUSS on 3 July 2020 on YouTube
- Facebook post and video titled “Dr Paul Tambyah reveals MOM’s role in outbreak of COVID-19 within dormitories”, published by TOC on 4 July 2020
- Video “TOC GE2020 Livestream – Afternoon session 2 July 2020”, published by TOC on 2 July 2020
- Online article “GE2020: Focus on public health could have been lost in March amid talk of early election, suggests SDP’s Paul Tambyah”, published by CNA on 4 July 2020
- Audio recording titled “An Interview with Dr Paul Tambyah”, published by New Naratif on 5 July 2020

2 The CDs will require NUSS, TOC, CNA and New Naratif to each carry a correction notice stating that the above-mentioned online content contains false statement of facts.

3 The NUSS video, TOC’s Facebook post and videos, CNA’s online article and New Naratif’s audio recording contain the following statements by Dr Paul Anantharajah Tambyah:

- Ministry of Manpower’s (MOM) email advisory to employers on testing of migrant workers was made without the advice from public health medical professionals
- MOM’s advisory stated that employers would lose their work pass privileges if they brought their workers for COVID-19 testing
- MOM actively discouraged the testing of workers

¹ A Correction Direction is a Direction issued to a person who has communicated a falsehood (i.e. the recipient) that affects the public interest. It requires the recipient to publish a correction notice, providing access to the correct facts. The Direction does not require the recipient to take down their post or make edits to their content and does not impose criminal sanctions.



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4 These statements are false. The Multi-Ministry Taskforce, led by the Ministers and staffed by senior public officials and medical professionals, was set up in January 2020 to direct the national whole-of-government response to COVID-19 and to ensure smooth coordination across Ministries and all affected sectors. The medical management of migrant workers was guided by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and its medical professionals, based on the prevailing scientific evidence and local situation.

5 On 8 February 2020, Changi General Hospital (CGH) informed MOH that an employer in the construction industry was sending all his workers to the CGH A&E Department to be tested for COVID-19 though the workers exhibited no symptoms and were well. They were also asking for memos from the hospital to certify that the workers were not infected with COVID-19 and were fit to work. The hospital was concerned that this would trigger a flood of healthy workers being sent to A&E departments, distracting them from the care and treatment of ill patients who required their attention. On 12 February 2020, MOH, MOM and other agencies jointly issued an advisory to the industry to advise that there was no need to prevent workers who were residing in the dormitory from working if they were not unwell.

6 Subsequently, the hospitals informed MOH that employers were still sending workers who were healthy for testing. MOH then informed MOM, and a further advisory was sent out on 19 February 2020 to advise employers not to send their workers who were healthy for testing, so as to ensure that medical facilities and resources were focused on unwell individuals who needed medical treatment. This advice was based on the prevailing scientific evidence at that time and was also in line with MOH's risk-based approach to prioritise testing and care for those who were of high risk.

7 In the advisories to employers, MOM did not say that employers could not bring their workers for testing. Neither did MOM actively discourage the testing of workers. What MOM said was: "Do not send workers to hospitals unless it is a medical emergency. If the worker is unwell, employers should send him to a general practitioner to seek medical attention, who will make a proper assessment on whether the worker needs to be sent to the hospital."

8 The same advice was given to all in Singapore, citizens as well as residents: If unwell, even with mild respiratory symptoms, see a general practitioner immediately, who will decide on the course of treatment.

9 The Multi-Ministry Taskforce and government agencies will continue to take proactive measures to ensure the well-being of our migrant workers and safeguard the health of the general public.

For more information

10 For details on the corrections and clarifications regarding the misleading false statements of facts, please refer to www.gov.sg/article/factually050720a