

Closing Remarks
Orlando O. Oxales
Convenor, UHC Watch

Stratbase ADRI VTHD
“Enabling Health Solutions and Innovations to improve the Philippine Public Health System”
21 May 2021

Transform our health system based on Universal Health Care principles

On behalf of the allied health advocacy groups of Universal Health Care Watch, The Philippine Alliance of Patient Organizations, Health Justice Philippines, the Philippines Diabetes Support and Awareness Inc., CitizenWatch Philippines, and Bantay Konsumer, Kalsada, Kuryente (BK3), we express our sincere appreciation to the organizers - Stratbase ADRI and its President Prof. Dindo Manhit, Executive Director Paco Pangalangan and ADRI team, our esteemed speakers: from the Department of Health, Director Enrique Tayag, The Honorable Mayor of Makati City, Mayor Mar-Len Abigail Binay, President of the Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP) Dr. Beaver Tamesis, General Manager of Roche Philippines, Inc. Ms. Kara Brotemarkle, Regional Business Lead of Worldwide Health of Microsoft Asia - Dr. Keren Priyadarshini, and Vice President and Board Member of the Philippines Diabetes Support and Awareness Inc. - Ms. Cynthia Clemen Duntz.

The devastating effects of this global health crisis has exposed the vulnerabilities of our public health system which the Universal Health Care law is envisioned to solve.

The world now realizes the interlocked relationship of health, the environment, and the economy, and having failed to maintain a balance in these ecosystems, has resulted in catastrophic and existential consequences that we are now battling to survive. A global health crisis that has become a transformative event that will change how we must live beyond this pandemic.

As keeping one's health is now the most important concern before everything else, the government must prioritize the implementation of the Universal Health Care Law as a strategic pillar of economic stability and growth.

As advocates, we call on all stakeholders to join our call to transform our health system based on these principles of Universal Health Care:

1. Accessibility - all patients have the right to access the healthcare that they need, when they need it.
2. Patient-centeredness and equity - all people regardless of disease or condition; age, gender, race, or ethnic background; sexual orientation; geographic location;

sociocultural background, economic or legal status, must have fair and impartial access to quality healthcare. We must put an end to the risk of medical bankruptcies or the economic catastrophe befalling a family because of a loved one falling victim to a disease or devastating accident.

3. Choice and empowerment - all patients have the right to know about the healthcare services that are available. Patients must be able to be meaningfully involved in healthcare decision-making at the local, national, regional, and global level.

We must nurture a culture of disease prevention that starts from early childhood to senior care, from vaccination, nutrition, and healthy lifestyle.

4. Quality - it is not enough for all patients to have access. Healthcare services must be safe, of the highest attainable standard and include a commitment to learning and improvement. Patients need to define what constitutes quality in healthcare and high standard services must be assured in every health care facility of the country.
5. Partnership and collaboration - patients have a moral and ethical right to play a meaningful role at all levels; in health and in other areas that can have an impact on health and wellbeing.
6. Sustainability and the value of healthcare - all stakeholders need to recognize the value of healthcare when considering investing in universal health coverage.
7. Accountability and transparency – This is vital to delivering safe, effective, and affordable healthcare. All stakeholders need to be held accountable on their commitments to implement universal health coverage and be accountable to the patients they serve.

Realizing these principles will need partnership and collaboration, an all of society approach that will mobilize the resources and expertise of all sectors. Crucial to achieving a truly responsive healthcare system is the government's investments in the public health facilities and the integration of the best health technologies.

The fast response of the pharmaceutical industry to develop vaccines and medicines to fight COVID-19 has been unprecedented, which further highlights how innovative health technologies have been critical in fighting the pandemic.

However, this pandemic actually has multiple victims. The people infected by the virus, and those who are immunocompromised or those with non-communicable diseases like hypertension, diabetes, and cancer, the top causes of death in the country. According to the WHO, delays and diagnosis, interruptions in therapy, and even abandonment have increased significantly. We have seen how the last surge in COVID-19 cases is limiting the access of non-COVID patients needing immediate and maintenance treatments.

In fighting the pandemic digital technologies have become the virtual life-saver that provided alternative modes of communication and cloud-based solutions that are now essential tools for continuity of all economic activities. We must harness the full potential of these new technologies to transform our health institutions and practices.

Digitalization of the Philippine health system will replace old, slow and leakage prone manual processes with fast, accurate, efficient, and transparent, digitally powered operations. With the digital transformation of our health ecosystem, the fragmentation issues in service delivery of local health systems can be harmonized. The resulting operational and cost efficiency will save financial resources that can then be channeled to further expanding accessibility of medicines and treatments for the bulk of the population who cannot afford out-of-pocket expenses for their medical needs. A digitized mode of pooled procurement of medicines and equipment as mandated in the UHC Act, will be more effective in providing medicines to our marginalized sectors who cannot even afford to buy, even with price control measures.

The enlightening talks of our esteemed speakers have appropriately contextualized their insights towards recovering from this pandemic. The drive for health innovation empowered with digital technologies has become the world's primary weapon against COVID-19 and is indispensable in rebuilding a post pandemic world that will be more prepared for the next deadly virus.

“The world cannot afford another global pandemic. As infections continue to spread, plus the absence of universal healthcare coverage, access to reliable and affordable medical and health services is a daily challenge faced by a vast majority of Filipinos.” (UHC Watch Manifesto)

“Every Filipino has the right to health. A right, intimately related to right to life, which is recognized in several treaties and covenants the Philippines adheres to, the Philippine Constitution, and domestic laws.” (UHC Watch Manifesto)

We must re-emphasize the importance of community and patient involvement in building our public health system. While we recognize that experts must be on board, people in communities and patients should never be forgotten. Lived experiences and feedback are key to sustaining our public health system.

It is important that government look at health services as an investment for the long term and the inclusive development that they keep on promising, particularly the Ambisyon 2040 of NEDA. Private sector participation and innovation is needed but at the end of the day...health is one of the core services that the government must provide so we can ensure that no one is left behind.

Let us raise our collective voice and call on our country's leaders to action.

“We call on the key stakeholders - patients, health professionals, patient organizations, local communities, the healthcare industry and the government to proactively collaborate in the decision-making process so that through this whole-of-society approach the country’s health systems could achieve better health outcomes with a greater sense of accountability in healthcare delivery.” (UHC Watch Manifesto)

“We appeal to the Government to prioritize the implementation of the Universal Health Care Law, together with other health laws and allocate adequate resources for their operationalization based on sound data and evidence-based information.” (UHC Watch Manifesto)

On behalf of Stratbase ADRI we thank all our speakers for yet another instructive gathering.

Stay safe, healthy, and happy!

###