

**CELEBRATION OF THE 50TH Anniversary of SEAMEO TROPMED
NETWORK**

30 August 2016

Amari Watergate Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

50th Anniversary Symposium

**Theme: “Achievements and Challenges for
Sustainable Development in Health”**

**Keynote Address: H.E. Dr. Paulyn Jean B. Rosell-Ubial, MPH, CESO II
Secretary of Health
Department of Health, Philippines**

Greetings: Dr. Pratap Singhasivanon, Secretary General/Coordinator SEAMEO
TROPMED Network;
Dr. Maria Sandra Tempongko, Assistant Secretary General/ Assistant
Coordinator SEAMEO TROPMED Network;
Governing Board Members;
Directors of TROPMED Centres;
Development Partners Development Partners;
Officials of Ministries of Health and Education of the 11 Member
Countries namely Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia,
Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste, Vietnam and my
country, the Philippines.
Alumni/Scholars;
Diplomatic Corps;
Guests, friends, ladies and gentlemen, Good Morning.

I warmly congratulate the leaders, members and staff of SEAMEO TROPMED Network (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Tropical Medicine) on the celebration of its 50th Anniversary and the holding of this significant symposium.

I am indeed honored to join the Governing Board as the new member representative from our country. This early, I wish to convey my sincere hope and desire to be able to participate and contribute to the objectives and priorities of this prestigious organization.

Our theme for this event, “Achievements and Challenges for Sustainable Development in Health” emphasizes the SEAMEO commitment and undertakings for key issues and concerns affecting the region.

Our country is still pursuing Universal Health Care. Relating to this, the Department of Health recognizes that Millennium Development Goals on health remain unfinished business.

The past five years have resulted in 92% of our population covered for health insurance and this translates to 45.5M indigents and 5.8M senior citizens. In terms of the Millennium Development Goals, we have increases in the following indicators: in our number of Fully Immunized Children, in the number of skilled birth attendance, in case detection rate and treatment success rate for tuberculosis, and in the number of malaria-free provinces. Our HIV prevalence remains at less than 1% and smoking prevalence in the Philippines decreased.

On the supply side, our Health Facilities Enhancement Program has improved thousands of the basic health facilities and tertiary hospitals run by the local government units and the DOH. Add to this the more than 111,000 health workers who have been deployed since 2010 to the 2nd quarter of this year.

Be that as it may, we are now facing the challenge of moving forward to Sustainable Development Goals, most especially towards “Ensuring Healthy Lives and promoting Wellbeing”

For the first 200 days of the new Administration, we are intending to achieve zero unmet need for family planning, no queueing in public health facilities, no balance billing for the poorest of the poor, to name a few.

For the long-term, we are also keen on facing changing public health issues, such as the triple burden of diseases, where our country and perhaps, our neighbours, still suffer from the strong ill effects of, first: the infectious/communicable diseases for which we desire 100% available commodities in Disease-Free Zones; second: the non-communicable diseases including nutrition and health promotion and healthy lifestyles, and third: injuries, mental illnesses and alcohol and drug abuse related to rapid urbanization and industrialization.

We continuously fight the emerging and re-emerging health problems. In addition to this, because there is also a great need, we also make sure that we tackle those issues that may be under the scope of other government agencies, but have great impact on health, some of which are climate change, the government's much-intensified war on drugs, local terrorism, as well as international terrorism that operate within our shores, and separatist movements.

As the newly-appointed Secretary of Health of the Philippines, I am, likewise, focused on this celebration's theme that parallel our country's present health agenda, the President's Health Agenda: to improve our achievements and face our great health challenges through financial risk protection, responsiveness of our health care delivery system and achievement of better health outcomes for all the Filipinos, and if I may articulate, for the whole Southeast Asian region.

We impress upon every health worker the need to identify significant and necessary changes and achieve good results from the implementation of such. Surely, every nation, particularly our Southeast Asian group, presents more or less the same problems in health and therefore, adopts similar programs, strategies and actions reflective of the country's agenda in an enlightened cultural and social harmony and diversity. We move on to advance primary care that is available, accessible, affordable, equitable and of quality as we give the full value to our clients and patients.

The call, therefore, for all of us is to strengthen investments and resources for health and create the needed changes along these. Most countries are moving towards effectiveness and efficiency to promote primary-care focused service

delivery networks and universal health coverage. The Philippines, in particular, would like to guarantee services that provide care for all life stages and address the triple burden of diseases, ensure that these services are accessible in functional service delivery networks, sustainably finance these through universal health insurance, and consequently, also guarantee health for all Filipinos.

To do these, we need to have the right number of health personnel with the right competencies for the right jobs, in the right places and with the right motivation. It is often said that the best resource an organization has are its dedicated people. Expressed as the human resources for health, this workforce, makes the difference between success and failure in all health development initiatives. We aim to attract the best and the brightest and continuously promote education, training and development, thereby assuring the health system of good performance and good outputs that create good outcomes. We harness fully the health human resources and health care providers for productivity and progress.

Readings, observations and experiences on health situationers present issues of shortage and maldistribution of health personnel in Southeast Asia in the context of the international trade in health services. Although, generally, there is no shortage of health workers in the region , when analyzed separately, five low-income countries have some deficit. All countries in Southeast Asia face problems of maldistribution of health workers, and rural areas are often understaffed. (Lindelov, et.al.) There is also the problem of mismatch or weak coordination between production of health workers and capacity for employment.

The Philippines' strategy for ensuring health worker employment and addressing the lack of health workers in the peripheral rural areas and in the Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas is in the context of deployment. For the past 20 years, the DOH has been deploying a number of physicians under the Doctors to the Barrios Program which sends much needed physicians to rural areas, and the Nurse Deployment Program that augment health human workforce where they are needed. These initiatives contribute towards addressing health inequities brought about by our urban-centered distribution.

Recently, we introduced the deployment of Physician Universal Health Care

Implementers. For 2016, we are looking at deploying around 300 doctors under these programs. This year will also see changes in our deployment approach where a mix of health workers shall fill the gaps in the rural areas.

The UN High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth projects that by 2030, “global demand for health care is projected to create more than **40 million** new employment opportunities, mostly in upper-middle and high-income countries. Conversely, low- and lower-middle-income countries are facing a potential deficit of **18 million** health workers to achieve the **Sustainable Development Goals**. The rising global demand and need for health workers, over the next fifteen years, presents significant challenges. Countries are called to explore steps to meet the global shortfall of trained health workers, within the context of achieving Universal Health Coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals.”¹ Corollary to this, the increasing trend of international migration of health workers may potentially aggravate the job/skills mismatch. This can affect “stability of health systems and global health security”. This may dismally impact the already existing problem of inequitable distribution of our health workers.

The SEAMEO TROPMED Network’s mission of development is valuable and highly appreciated by the Philippines. The development of individual and institutional capacity in delivering quality health care is a notable input to realize the organization’s and our country’s responsibility and commitment for quality in health service delivery.

Further, the SEAMEO’s objectives of training health workers, research on diseases, health policy advocacy, community empowerment to solve health problems, health promotion and disease prevention utilizing traditional and modern tools all add up to minimize the economic burden of health. I salute SEAMEO for all of these!

May I enjoin all the member nations, the health workers and their citizenry to echo our rallying cry “All for Health Towards Health for All”.

Thank you very much, and good day to you all. *Mabuhay!*

¹ Chan, Margaret. WHO statement on UN HLCEEG. <http://www.who.int/>. March 2, 2016