AFICS PHILIPPINES

NEWSLETTER

Association of Former International Civil Servants - Philippines

JULY 2023



President's Message

Alcestis A. Mangahas

Welcome to the 2023 summer edition of our AFICS Philippines Newsletter! Mid-year offers a great opportunity to review priorities and activities as reflected in our 2022 - 2023 work plans: strengthening our core (expand membership, defense of pension and insurance entitlements); seeking relevance (advocacy, social interaction and outreach to those in need); and global solidarity (engagement in global UN Retirees organizations.)

We have been super-active this first half of 2023. Our January General Assembly kicked off a series of initiatives at a pace that surprised even ourselves! "A Taste of Laguna" brought over 20 AFICSers on a road-trip outside of Manila, strengthening our bonds of friendship. "PaBongga sa Bingo", our summer outreach effort, raised over a hundred thousand pesos and provided a wonderful opportunity to interact with co-seniors in two homes for the elderly. And more recently, "How to be a Lucky UN Retiree" signaled the return of the AFICS Pre-retirement seminar.

Let' s continue to work towards expanding and energizing our membership base. We also need to push for innovative and creative ways to augment and strengthen our financial reserves. I have all the faith that with typical UN fervor, we can get this done, superbly!

This July 15-22, I am leaving to join the FAFICS General Council Meeting in Vienna, Austria. Together with Lydia Ontal and Delia Barcelona, we hope to once again raise the profile of AFICS- PHL and show our organizational strength and resilience at the global level. We hope to bring good news home!

AFICS PHL's Outreach: Celebrating Senior Mothers

By Lois L. Villanueva



The 2023 AFICS Philippines Outreach Team Programme exceeded expectations once again with the successful Pabongga sa Bingo event held at two homes for the elderly! The first location was the Anawin Lay Mission Home for the Elderly in Rodriguez (Montalban), Rizal, followed by the Bahay Kanlungan ni Maria Domenica run by the Camillian Sisters in Antipolo City.

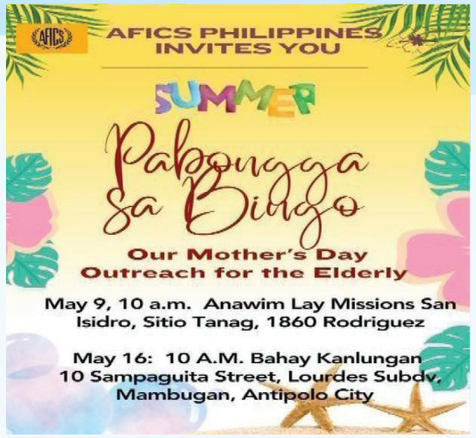
The bingo event, held as part of the Mother's Day celebration, brought joy and laughter to approximately 80 senior mothers, many of whom were wheelchair-bound.

(Cont'd on page 2)

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(**AFICS Phil's Outreach.** *Cont'd from page 1*)



In addition to the food and various bingo prizes of summer shirts, shawls, duster, slippers, mugs and toothbrushes, our AFICS Philippines Outreach Team was able to distribute donations that included two wheelchairs, two wall fans, two solar lights with solar panels, three solar emergency lamps, outdoor multi-function portable flashlights or camping lights, 34 packs of adult diapers, 40 tote bags, 40 summer shirts, 15 boxes of face masks, rice, sugar, cooking oil, barako coffee, under pads, pillows, and 5-shelf plastic drawers.

Antibiotics, vitamins, and medicines commonly used for geriatric diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes were also secured from the Department of Health for the two homes through the efforts of Dr. Linda Milan.

The successful outreach events for the senior mothers were organized by the AFICS Outreach Committee, led by Jana Ricasio and her teammates Rencee Tayzon, Danny Carlos, Socorro Reyes, Linda Milan, and Anna Senga. In attendance to the events were President Thetis Mangahas, ex-President Ed Ortega and his spouse, Medy, and Lois Villanueva.

The mothers must have felt loved, remembered, and cared for. The Pabongga sa Bingo also created special memories for AFICS members as they witnessed the elderly feel less lonely, more socially connected, and emotionally engaged.









TASTE of LAGUNA: AFICS bonding field trip

By Delia Barcelona

Some 25 AFICS members (and prospective members) enjoyed a one-day outing to 3 towns of Laguna. The itinerary included visits to Pakil, to Sta. Cruz, and Pila.

In Pakil, considered Laguna's pilgrimage center (and where two AFICS Phil's lifetime members Ces Adorna and Delia Barcelona hail from) included visits to the centuries old Spanish parish church and the Shrine of Our Lady of Turumba. This was followed by a sumptuous lunch of native cuisines (*ginataang hipon, rellenong bangus, adobong manok,* salad, local *okoy*, homemade buko juice and ice cream, as well as a pre-ordered *kesong puti* to take home) for all to enjoy at the beautiful resort-like residence of the Adornas.

The Municipal Town Mayor, Mr. Vince Soriano, dropped in informally and engaged the group in dialogue about local politics and his development initiatives. Immediately after lunch, the group proceeded to Sta. Cruz, Laguna and experienced ANILAG (*Ani ng Laguna*) which showcased some of the Laguna towns' best products and culture. The day ended with a brief stop in Pila, to visit another historic church, the Shrine of San Antonio de Pauda, and some ancestral homes. To cool down after a long hot day, the group enjoyed the old-time favorite summer treat, halo- halo, before boarding the bus that took them back to Metro Manila. It may have been exhausting, but truly a day well spent.









SPECIAL FEATURE

Meet the UN RC in the Philippines



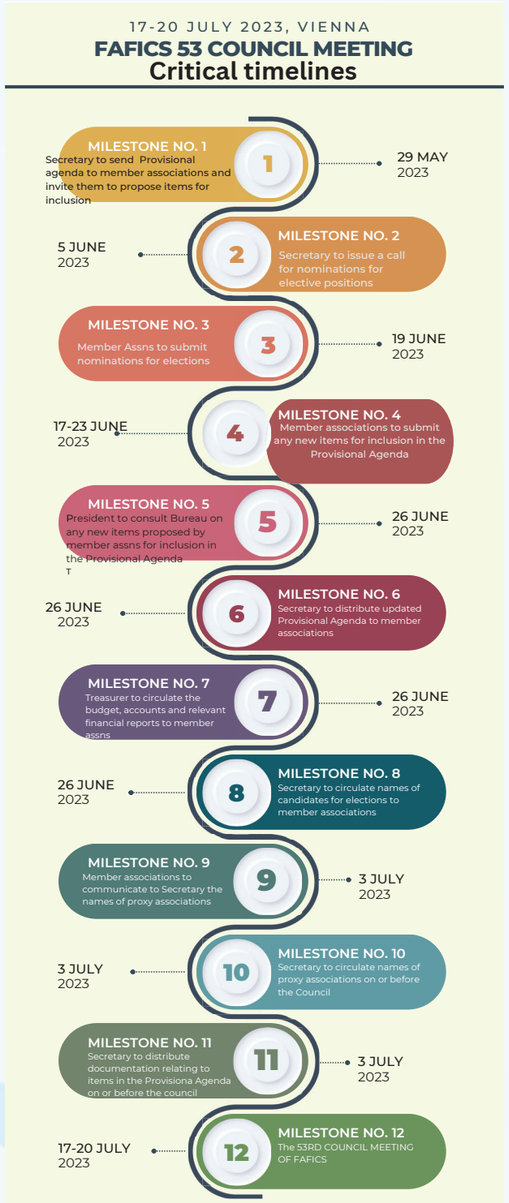
Mr. Gustavo González from Argentina is currently the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in the Philippines. He brings 30 years of international experiencein humanitarian, peacebuilding, and development affairs in countries in transition across different geographical regions. He led large scale operations in crisis and postcrisis settings and peace negotiations involving state and non- state actors and contributed to global best practices in the field of resource mobilization and partnership building.

Prior to joining the Resident Coordinator System, he worked at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as Director of the Business Development and Resource Mobilization Division. He also held several senior positions at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), covering related operations in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Turkey; he was Senior Country Director in Yemen during the Arab Spring; Country Director in Burundi during the political transition; and Head of the Post-Conflict Unit in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He also worked with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Guinea-Bissau and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) in the Central African Republic.

Before the UN, Mr. González worked for the Organization of American States (OAS) in Nicaragua, within the framework of the Peace Accords for Central America. He holds a master's degree from the Said Business School at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom and a master's degree in philosophy from the Universidad del Salvador in Argentina. He is fluent in English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish.

FAFICS 53rd Council Session meets in Vienna,17-20 July 2023

Preparations are underway for this 53rd Council which will take up several agenda items relating to pensions and health insurance. AFICS Philippines (AFICS Phil) will be represented again by President Thetis Mangahas; Delia Barcelona, FAFICS/AFICS Phil VP; Lydia Ontal, FAFICS Emerita (all three in person), and Marlene Arduo, AFICS Phil VP / FAFICS Rep to Pension Board (virtually). *(See below.)*



AFICS Philippines NEWS BITS

Jan. - June 2023

- The AFICS Philippines General Meeting was held on January 19, 2023 via zoom. President Thetis recognized core activities implemented by the different committees; the relevance of AFICS Philippines through its outreach activities and support to the UN Declaration on Healthy Ageing; and its "Global Solidarity" with stronger engagement with FAFICS and UNJSPF.

- For 2022, an additional 13 regular and 15 associate members were added to our roster.

- Pre-Retirement Seminar for 2023 is being scheduled through the UNRC Office. The 5th Edition of our UN Retirement Handbook will be made available for participants at a reasonable price.

- Membership fees comprise 84% of AFICS Phil's income. As of December 2022, current funds is at P255,882.97. Plans for generating much-needed funds is one of the association's priorities.

- The Outreach Committee's on-line auction and outright donation raised Php 88,575. (See article on Pabongga sa Bingo). Residual funds also supported AJ Kalinga Foundation's Alternative Learning System and Urban Gardening.

- The AFICS ExCom Meeting was held on April 22, 2023 via Zoom, moderated by Executive Vice President Reggie Molera. A report on the Taste of Laguna event's lessons learned and budget was presented by Delia Barcelona and Danny Carlos. Forthcoming events were discussed which included the Pabongga sa Bingo, A Mother's Day Outreach, Pension and Benefits Seminar and the FAFICS Council 53rd Meeting. Specific action points included, among others, remittance to FAFICS of US$ 170, need to outline mechanics on petty cash replenishment and disbursement, and engagement of a point person to streamline AFICS financial transactions.

- A special committee has been created to develop a Rules of Procedures for AFICS-PHL, based on its current Statutes and By-laws. The Committee is chaired by Ruth Batten and includes Thetis Mangahas, Tony Fernandez, and Delia Barcelona as members. The review will take into account provisions that may either be inadequate, missing or duplicative in the current Statues and By-laws. Once the work is completed, the draft Rules of Procedure will be presented to the Executive Committee for comments and for ratification by the members of AFICS-PHL at its next general assembly.

Editor's Note: For brevity, AFICS-Phil is the acronym used for the association's name.

Call for Articles and Volunteers

If you have interesting stories, anecdotes, photos, ideas or time to share with our Committee, please let us know. We welcome contributions and volunteer support.
Contact us at

philippinesafics@gmail.com.

To apply for membership, please click this link, or copy and paste in your browser:

AFICS-PHL MEMBERSHIP FORM

Current members may also update their info using the same link.

Meet AFICS PHL's own"Agent 007": Alberto "Bob" De la Rosa

By Delia R. Barcelona

He spent years keeping the UN safe and secure…

(Editor's Note: Based on an interview by Maria Diaz and Tony Fernandez in 2018 with updates from Bob himself.)



Bob with SG Kofi Annan

Fortuitously, his passion for racket-ball sports, and his preoccupation with telecommunications, and immersion on security matters provided him many opportunities to hobnob with top government officials involved with security including the National Intelligence and Security Agency and the Intelligence Services of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. In one of those occasions, an opportunity opened for him to be appointed head of the Counterintelligence Unit of the Manila International Airport Complex. After some years with the government, and as coups became more common in many parts of the world, and many countries were threatened with instability, he was recruited by UNDP in 1989 to help provide security arrangements for UN agencies whose personnel were operating in the field.

Following his stint with the UN in Manila, he was assigned in 1995 to Lagos, Nigeria, then considered as one of the most dangerous places in the world serving as Field Security Coordination Officer and Chief Security Adviser to the Chief of Mission. His work included the difficult job of providing security to visiting high ranking UN dignitaries and UN heads of agencies. He is credited for introducing centralized communication system using two way radios, which has become integral to security measures as part of the "ERT" – or Emergency Reaction Team 24/7, making the radio system a must-have technology for every duty station.

Years later, his earlier boss UNDP RR and Resident Coordinator for the Philippines, Mr.Turhan Mangun, once again tapped his credentials for more security work, which led him to UN HQ to work under then UN Security Coordinator Robert Thompson who reported directly to the UN Secretary-General.

In a span of almost two decades (1989 to 2006) his work assignments have taken him on a tour of some of the most troubled countries of the world. Still, he considers it a privilege to have had the experience to work in such countries like China, Papua New Guinea, Italy, New York, Egypt, Ghana, Mozambique, Kuwait, Iraq, Cyprus, South Africa, Thailand, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Lebanon, Maldives, and Nigeria.

One of Bob's most unforgettable experiences was the offer to go back to Baghdad as Field Security Coordination Officer but thought it best to not accept the assignment due to the extremely challenging and still dangerous circumstances surrounding the Iraq war. Had he accepted the offer, he could have been one of the victims of the August 19, 2003, bombing of the UN Baghdad Office which injured over 150 UN staff members and killed at least 22 people, including the United Nations Special Representative to Iraq, Sérgio Vieira de Mello.

Bob holds a degree in Business Administration from the University of the Philippines, but even then, Bob admits that he preferred playing tennis and pelota rather than hitting the books. He was also an aficionado of citizen's band (CB) radio communication. In fact, it was this CB hobby that led him to become a consultant for the National Telecommunications Commission and adviser to government agencies as his expertise was rallying for the use CB radios for intelligence-gathering, identifying problem communities and ferreting out anti-government elements.

As part of his work in UNDP HQ, Bob was also instrumental in working with over 177 countries online to become compliant with Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS) Consequently, he became a "roving envoy" to several countries, assessing the security situation as well as determining evacuation points for UN staff members.

He retired in 2006 but continued to be mobilized for short-term postings such as to Sri Lanka at the height of the fighting between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and government forces and again in Nigeria. He has since retired for good, and now enjoying Manila's sights and sounds, playing golf with his buddies as often as he possibly can.



As golf continues to be Bob's passion, his post COVID- 19 pandemic games have earned him so many awards, along with his other golf mates. To name a few, his group became Team champion in the super senior division (75 years old and above) during the 37th ASEAN Golf Championship in 2023, his first golf award after the COVID-19 pandemic; again won the NET Champion Group V event of



the 2nd Leg OS GAI-FPAGI Golf Tournament at the Orchard Golf and Country Club in Cavite, representing the Camp Aguinaldo Senior Club in the tournament; and again as TEAM NET champion in the same tournament, in spite of having only few players competing with other clubs that had a minimum of about 15 members per team.

To this day, Bob always encourages Filipinos to join the UN Security Force, with the admonition for them to be diligent at work. It is imperative that one's performance be excellent. In this line of work, the failure of security means only one thing: lives will surely be lost. Bob has been described more as a character in the mold of "James Bond" rather than a traditional UN international civil servant.

Those with whom he has worked and have come to know him professionally or personally will affirm that this is how he is: serious in work, and equally serious at play. Indeed, just like the fictional Agent 007.

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Come join our Pre-Retirement Seminar

By Marylina Mabida

On June 16, 2023, AFICS Philippines (AFICS PHL) is hosting a pre-retirement seminar, intended for anyone in the UN who is interested, about to retire soon, or just want some refresher course about retirement issues. It may also be useful for HR practitioners in the UN who play a key role in providing guidance to retirees, or retirees-to-be.

The half-day programme's key presenter and resource person is no other than AFICS Phil's Vice-President for Pensions and Benefits, Maria Magdalena (Marlene) Arduo. The seminar will:

- highlight information about retirement, including benefits for spouses or survivors,
- clarify issues relating to the one-track vs. two track system,
- provide tips on what to do when a retiree passes away, among other practical tips.

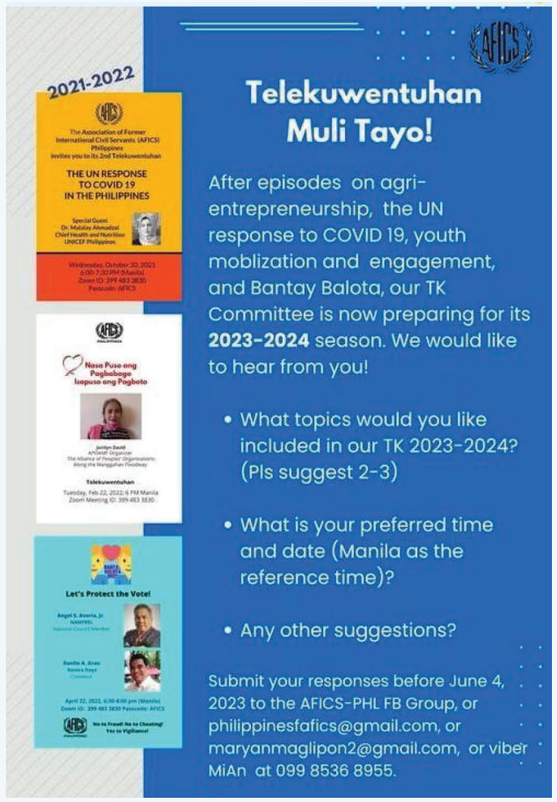
The seminar is offered on a first come, first served basis. (See related poster below).

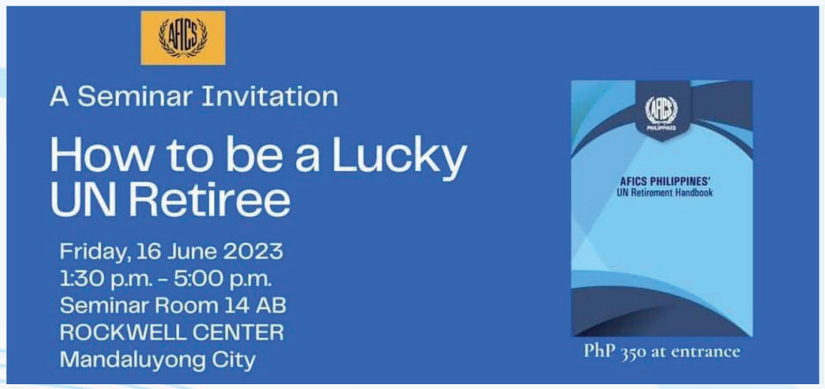
In addition, seminar attendees will be (re) introduced to a very useful and comprehensive resource, the AFICS-Phil UN Retirement Handbook, now in its the 5th Edition (sold at PhP 350 per copy). This has been consolidated over the years by Marlene herself and is a helpful reference for retirees as well as families of UN staff retirees, giving guidance on what to do when the retiree passes away.

For more information, contact Marlene at marlenearduo@gmail.com.

The Telekwentuhan Journey

Nearly two years after the first Telekwentuhan, a survey is currently ongoing to get members' feedback on the online series. AFICS members are encouraged to suggest topics of interest and nearest to their hearts so that the committee can finalize its arrangements. So far, Telekwentuhan has had four episodes with special resource persons tapped to share their experience and expertise on the chosen topics. Ces Adorna, Chair of the Telekwentuhan Committee, hopes more AFICS members can tune in and participate in the future.







HOW AFICS HAS HELPED UN RETIREES

Real life stories collated by Antonio L. Fernandez (First of a Series)

AFICS PHL has played a crucial role in supporting Filipino UN retirees and their beneficiaries regarding pension and health benefit issues. Personal stories highlighting the positive impact of AFICS Phil's assistance are featured in this new series.

Unexpected windfall. Mrs. Azucena "Ceny" Barroza and her daughters, Carmela and Norma, during the AFICS General Assembly on February 28, 2016, shared exciting news about an unexpected windfall. In February, Mrs. Barroza received a cheque from the AETNA Life Insurance Company, which was from her late husband's free After-Service Life Insurance.

Juanito "Johnny" Barroza, a radio operator, began his career with the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNSTO) on May 15, 1978, and chose early retirement in 1996. He passed away in November 2012. (Source: "A Loving Gift from Beyond," written by Marylina Mabida and Ludy Santos, AFICS-PHL Newsletter, June 2016).

Deduction waived. During the 2014 Christmas Party, Ms. Virginia "Gin" Mata, the oldest AFICS PHL member at 90 years old who had worked at WHO/WPRO, related that her pension had been deducted for several months due to an overpayment of her pension. This miscalculation came to light when Gin applied for the two-track option earlier that year.

AFICS PHL took action to address the situation. Oscar Colmenar, a Filipino colleague officer at the UNJSPF who was present at the party, was al er t ed . As the overpayment was solely the fault of the Pension Fund, AFICS PHL sought to have UNJSPF reconsider its decision given Gin's advanced age. The deduction was eventually partly reduced given the circumstances of the error but still the pension monthly deduction remained challenging and upsetting for someone of her age.

AFICS PHL reached out to Ms. Lydia Ontal of AFICS-New York, who approached Mr. Sergio Arvizu, the UNJSPF CEO, during the FAFICS Council meeting. Recognizing the clear merit of her situation, Mr. Arvizu approved that "no further recovery be made by her." (Source: "AFICS Assists Pensioners," AFICS-PHL Newsletter, June 2016).

Editor's Note: For brevity, AFICS PHL is used for the Association's name.

"It's time to accept your past is precious. Your future is invaluable, but you should not forget the present. Value each day!"

- adapted from Ted O'Neal, author of Help for a Happy Retirement (2001).





Tips for Healthy Ageing

By Tess Stuart

The World Health Organization recognizes that our health is not only measured by physical or biological parameters but also by our mental and social well-being.

Dr. Jaime Galvez-Tan, former DOH Secretary and former UNICEF Regional Health Adviser at the East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, shares his Zero-Cost Prescription for a Healthy, Long Life. He believes that health is a body-mind-spirit confluence with the divine, with nature, and with others. Here are his recommendations:

1. Sleep in total darkness for seven to eight hours. He explained that darkness was created to make us rest, adding that it helps produce melatonin that promotes youthfulness.

2. Keep digital gadgets like cell phones, tablets, and watches at least a meter away from the bed as "their electromagnetic waves interfere with the brain waves," he said. If one wakes in the middle of the night, never be tempted to watch TV, read, or log on to the Internet.

3. When you wake up in the morning, think positively, and go up to the mirror and greet your image: "Good morning, Handsome! or Good morning, Beautiful!" Then declare: I am healthy! I am happy! I am loved! I am prosperous! He said it is vital to " claim the present because whatever you declare will manifest. This is the universal law of attraction."

4. Practice physical activity or exercise for 20-30 minutes daily. An hour's walk is equal to 10,000 steps a day, even if not continuous.

5. Maintain friendships. Follow the adage "to love and be loved". Keep ties with kindred spirits throughout life. Even donating to charity releases happy hormones called endorphins.

6. Forgive and ask forgiveness. He said social medicine evidence shows that this works although it may be the hardest act.

7. Laughter and sex reduce aging. Watch funny films or videos.

8. Have time for silence, stillness, meditation, and prayer.

9. Eat lots of plant-based food (vegetables, fruits, nuts, beans, lentils) apart from complex carbohydrates and deep-sea fish. Avoid white sugar, white bread, and processed meats (like *tocino* and *longganisa*).

10. Drink warm or room temperature liquids, mineral water, dark chocolate (*tablea*), and green tea. He advised against distilled water, which is "dead water" as it has no minerals and doesn't rehydrate the body.

11. Free yourself from addictions to smoking, alcohol, gambling, drugs, and sex. Also, toxic is secondhand smoke, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and heavy metals.

Elderly Concerns *(Cont'd from p, 11)*

public service in these areas such as free screening tests for dementia and depression. For more information, watch out for BM's monthly "lay forums" through its Facebook page or text Adele at 09174167849.



Elderly Concerns

2 Ds That Worry Older People: Depression and Dementia

By A. L. Fernandez

If I am diagnosed with dementia, is my life over?

This and other questions were answered by six psychiatrists of The Medical City in an online zoom meeting organized by Bantay Matanda (BM) last 27 May 2023. Bantay Matanda is a Quezon City-based NGO founded by Adele C. Joaquin, which caters to the welfare of the Filipino elderly. Adele. herself a senior citizen, experienced caring for her mom with dementia for 16 years.

In the first part of the virtual Forum, Dr. Jose Nicolo D. Antonio and Dr. Roda Tessa Estrella-Sollano, experts on depression and dementia, respectively dispelled myths about these two medical conditions. They clarified that while dementia was commonly observed among the elderly, it must not be considered as normal in the process of ageing. In the context of memory loss, daily activities should not be affected by ageing, according to Dr. Sollano. Not all dementia is Alzheimer's disease as there are others that affect men and women of any age, like those caused by stroke (vascular), traumatic brain injury, alcohol use or Lewy—Body dementia (that afflicted the late actor Robin Williams),

The panel consisting of four others from the hospital's Center for Behavioral Health (CBH), namely Drs. Kevin Veneracion, Ivy Uy, Mary Camille Reyes, and Sophia Narciso-Bitong, were on hand to answer questions from the audience.

Their advice - seek professional help to help a loved one cope with memory problems, concentration, difficulty multitask and make decisions. These are symptoms of depression and dementia that overlap in the elderly. Other symptoms of depression include fatigue; psychomotor retardation; poor memory, concentration and processing; insomnia



or hypersomnia; cognitive impairment. When two conditions – depressed mood and anhedonia (i.e., finding no pleasure or having low interest in activities) or apathy combined with three or more symptoms are observed, medical attention is merited.

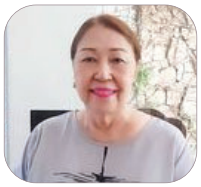
Treatment may be done through psychological and pharmacological (by medication) means. While there is no guaranteed treatment for dementia, its progression can be slowed down through mental and physical exercises, and medication which has a protective effect and provides stimulus to the brain. The psychiatrist approaches each individual in a holistic manner, considering even a person's preferences for alternative means (like meditation, yoga).

There are people, especially those with less economic means, who hesitate to seek medical help due to the costs involved. The advice is to check with government hospitals and barangay health centers if support is available for free. The there are also non-profit organizations like Bantay Matanda and Center for Behavioral Health that provide *(Continued on page 10)*

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