

Dr. Google, self-medicating preferred by Filipinos

By Patricia B. Mirasol
Reporter

FILIPINOS would rather Google medical information and self-medicate than consult a doctor, according to a recent survey.

A 2021 wellness index by health maintenance organization PhilHealthCare, Inc. (PhilCare) found that only 7.4% of 1,500 respondents do not self-medicate.

The majority, meanwhile, self-medicate because they have been able to treat themselves before (with 28.6% strongly agreeing and 40.3% agreeing); they are also able to seek advice from friends and family (28.6% strongly agreeing and 43.1%

agreeing), and search online for medical information (25.5% strongly agreeing and 40.2% agreeing).

“We are not at all surprised with this result, especially if you view it from the context of how the pandemic has changed the mindset of Filipinos when it comes to health,” said Joseph Agustin “Jaeger” L. Tanco, PhilCare president and chief executive officer, in an e-mail to *BusinessWorld*. Mr. Tanco noted that Filipino workers now see healthcare as among the top things they value in a workplace.

The PhilCare survey also found that Filipinos would rather do online research than online consultation. Almost half of the respondents said they are not comfortable consulting a doctor online or over the

telephone. Another 39% said they prefer not to spend on a new consultation to get prescription refills.

Inasmuch as health professionals use online platforms to disseminate health-related information, the medium can also provide a fertile ground for misinformation.

A January 2021 study at the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* found that the prevalence of health misinformation was high on the following public health issues: smoking products, drugs, and vaccines. The study also singled out Twitter as the social media platform with the highest prevalence of health misinformation.

“We need to rethink the way health is delivered, especially under this so-called next normal.

That way, people still get the professional healthcare that they need, while addressing their anxiety resulting from the pandemic,” said Mr. Tanco, adding telemedicine should gain more traction.

“Despite being less anxious about going to hospitals as compared to 2020, Filipinos still worry about getting COVID-19 if they [have to] physically go there to get medical attention,” he added.

The heightened need for health, coupled with the worry of getting COVID-19 in hospitals, has resulted in the decision to self-medicate among many Filipinos, according to Mr. Tanco.

Self-medication is the use of drugs to treat self-diagnosed medical conditions. Without

medical guidance, self-medication can lead to incorrect or inappropriate therapy, missed diagnoses, increased morbidity, and resistance to antibiotics.

Antimicrobial resistance stems from “superbugs” evolving from the misuse of antibiotics. It caused the deaths of 1.27 million people in 2019 — higher than HIV/AIDS or malaria, per the *Global Research on Antimicrobial Resistance* report.

The PhilCare Wellness Index was conducted via a nationwide telephone survey Sept. 4-20, 2021. A majority of the respondents — who were randomly selected from Metro Manila and 65 provinces — are employees (96.1%), with 64.5% working for private firms.



DANILLO ALVAREZ/ONMSA/ASPI

OPINION

Vaccination among children

The government is ramping up preparations for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccinations for children aged 5 to 11 years old starting Feb. 4.

This comes after the government allowed vaccination for children 12 to 17 years old in efforts to also protect them from getting seriously ill from highly infectious and potentially fatal SARS-CoV-2 variants.

Children are as likely to be infected with COVID-19 as adults, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said. It added that before the vaccination recommendation for children was given, scientists conducted clinical trials with thousands of children, and no serious safety concerns were identified.

The CDC explained that a vaccinated child can be protected from the short and long-effects of COVID-19. It can also help protect family members who are not yet eligible for vaccination like siblings who are below the age of 5. Others who are expected to benefit are people who may be at increased risk of getting very sick if they were infected. If a vaccinated

child still gets infected, the vaccine can also help him or her from getting seriously sick.

The Philippine Pediatric Society (PPS) and Pediatric Infectious Disease Society of the Philippines (PIDSP) fully support vaccinating children ages 5 to 11 years old. “Although cases of COVID-19 in the pediatric age group remain less severe compared to older adults, children can still be hospitalized and even require admission to an intensive care unit,” the statement said.

It added that in the Philippines, around 3% of cases and 0.5% of mortalities of COVID-19 are among children aged 5-11 years old, a trend similar to that seen worldwide.

Immunization is indeed one of the most successful and cost-effective health interventions known. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the provision of vital health services including immunization for other vaccine-preventable diseases. The Omicron-driven surge that the country is experiencing is adding to this disruption.

Global immunization coverage dropped from 86% in 2019 to 83% in 2020, according to the

World Health Organization (WHO). An estimated 23 million children under the age of one year did not receive basic vaccines in 2020, around 3.7 million more than in 2019 and the highest number since 2009. In 2020, the number of completely unvaccinated children increased by 3.4 million. Only 19 vaccine introductions were reported in 2020, less than half of any year in the past two decades. The WHO predicts that this slowdown is likely to continue as countries focus on ongoing efforts to control the COVID-19 pandemic, and on the introduction of COVID-19 vaccines.

According to the WHO, the disruption in immunization services as a result of the pandemic may lead to more outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases. Moreover, the WHO warns that, if not addressed quickly, the disruption will add further strain to healthcare systems already overburdened because of COVID-19. In addition, the potential for co-circulation of influenza, or any other epidemic pathogens (for example, measles, respiratory syncytial virus, and meningitis), and COVID-19 could further burden healthcare systems in the upcoming months.

Data from the Department of Health (DoH) showed that our country’s immunization rate

dropped from 69% in 2019 to 65% in 2020. The DoH has reiterated its appeal to all parents to bring their children to health centers for free vaccines that protect against life-threatening diseases.

To broaden access to immunization services amid the pandemic, DoH health workers are conducting house-to-house immunization, while others ride tricycles or boats to vaccinate children in far-flung areas. Community-based immunizations are also being implemented in targeted hard-to-reach communities.

While emphasis is placed on pediatric immunization coverage, vaccination can also prevent an overall great number of deaths in older adults, and is essential to living healthier lives. Taking a life-course approach to immunization — vaccination given through all phases of life — will not only help individuals maintain good health throughout their life, but also has the potential for enormous public health and socioeconomic benefits, according to Health Policy Partnership.

“Through herd immunity, widespread vaccination can reduce rates of illness in our societies, including among people who are not vaccinated. This is crucial for vulnerable people,

such as young infants or people with certain illnesses, who cannot be vaccinated themselves. High vaccination rates can also help to reduce our reliance on antibiotics, which contributes to antimicrobial resistance — one of the most pressing challenges facing healthcare in the 21st century,” Health Policy Partnership explained.

To support a successful implementation of life-course immunization, the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers & Associations (IFPMA) recommends that governments and other stakeholders expand vaccine delivery channels to include pharmacy-based, community-based, employer-based, residential-care-based, and school-based delivery of vaccinations.

MEDICINE CABINET TEODORO B. PADILLA

TEODORO B. PADILLA is the executive director of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP), which represents the biopharmaceutical medicines and vaccines industry in the country. Its members are at the forefront of research and development efforts for COVID-19 and other diseases that affect Filipinos.



Myanmar activists vow to defy junta with strike on coup anniversary

MYANMAR’S military rulers have threatened to jail anti-coup protesters who take part in a “silent strike” on Tuesday, a year since the generals seized power, as the United States, Britain and Canada imposed new sanctions.

The Southeast Asian country has been in chaos since Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and other figures from her National League for Democracy (NLD) party were rounded up in raids, accused by the junta of rigging a 2020 election the NLD won.

The overthrow of Ms. Suu Kyi’s government triggered huge street protests last year and the security forces killed hundreds in crackdowns that ensued leading to the formation of “people’s defense forces” to take on the well-equipped army.

In recent days, activists have urged people to stay indoors and businesses to close on Tuesday.

“We might be arrested and spend our life in jail if we’re lucky. We might be tortured and killed if we’re unlucky,” said youth activist Nan Lin, who hoped the strike would send a message to the junta.

A spokesman for the ruling military did not respond to telephone calls seeking comment.

State media reported military ruler Min Aung Hlaing had on Monday extended a state of emergency for six months to facilitate promised elections.

“It was necessary to set the right track for the genuine, disciplined multi-party democracy,” Min Aung Hlaing said in a report in the *Global New Light of Myanmar*, where he talked about the threat from “internal and external saboteurs” and “terrorist attacks and destruction”.

The state-run newspaper said the military government would strive to hold new elections once the situation was “peaceful and stable”, without giving a date.

In the northern city of Myitkyina, a photograph of a sign put up by the military warned residents not to join the silent protest or face jail terms of up to 20 years, though images of the

city posted on social media on Tuesday showed largely deserted streets.

In the main city of Yangon, photographs on a social media page put up by strike organizers showed a small protest where people threw red paint on the ground.

The impact of the calls for a nationwide strike was not immediately clear. At least four people were arrested in the central town of Patheingyi for inciting silent protests on social media, the *Ayanwaddy Times* reported.

INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, in comments ahead of the coup anniversary, urged the junta to allow greater humanitarian access.

The junta has accused the United Nations of bias and interference and is refusing to bow to international pressure, despite a corporate retreat from Myanmar and sanctions, the latest on Monday, when the United States, Britain and Canada blacklisted more individuals linked to the junta.

For ordinary Myanmar people, life since the coup has become a grind with the economy withering, regular power cuts and internet curbs and, for some, a constant fear of being detained.

Security forces cracking down on dissent have killed at least 1,500 people and arrested 11,838 since the coup, according to the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners, an activist group cited by the United Nations. The junta disputes the death toll.

Ms. Suu Kyi, 76, is on trial in more than a dozen cases that carry a combined maximum sentence of more than 150 years in prison, charges that critics say are designed to ensure she can never return to politics.

In a joint statement, the foreign ministers of countries including Australia, Britain, South Korea, the United States, Canada as well as the European Union urged the international community to cease the flow of “arms, materiel, dual-use equipment, and technical assistance” to the Myanmar military. — *Reuters*

The New York Times acquires hit game Wordle

THE SUDDEN hit *Wordle*, in which once a day players get six chances to guess a five-letter word, has been acquired by *The New York Times Co.*

The purchase, announced by the *Times* on Monday, reflects the growing importance of games, like crosswords and *Spelling Bee*, in the company’s quest to increase digital subscriptions to 10 million by 2025.

Wordle was acquired from its creator, Josh Wardle, a software engineer in New York, for a price “in the low seven figures,” the *Times* said. The company said the game would initially remain free to new and existing players.

Wordle — the name is a cheeky pun on its creator’s name — has had a striking rise. It first appeared on a no-frills,

ad-free website in October and had 90 users on Nov. 1. That number grew to 300,000 by the middle of January, and now millions play the game daily, according to the *Times* announcement.

A feature enables users to share their performance, with rows of five bricks indicating how close they were to guessing the correct word. For the uninitiated:

A green brick indicates that the letter is correct and in the exact location; a yellow brick indicates that the letter appears in the word but in a different place; and a gray or black brick indicates that the letter does not appear anywhere in the word. These analog brick layouts have been endlessly memed and have driven millions of tweets. — © 2022 *The New York Times*

Thailand set for rush of tourists with quarantine-free visas

THAILAND expects to welcome hundreds of thousands of holidaymakers a month with the kickoff of a quarantine-free visa program that’s set to serve as a model for tourism-reliant countries balancing safe border reopening with economic revival.

Starting Tuesday, visitors of any nationality can apply for quarantine-free entry into Thailand, provided they are fully vaccinated. The government expects between 200,000 and 300,000 travelers to take advantage of the so-called Test & Go program in February alone, with the numbers expected to swell in the following months.

The wider reopening — a previous quarantine-free program was restricted to visitors from only about 60 countries — is part of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha’s push to adopt a “living with the COVID strategy” to rescue the pandemic-battered economy. About a fifth of gross domestic product before the virus came from tourism-related activities.

Thailand moved up 18 places in Bloomberg’s latest COVID resiliency ranking with its ramp-up in vaccinations and taming of the Omicron-fueled outbreak.

“It’s a fine balance between tourism recovery and public health,” said Marisa Sukosol Nunbhakdi, president of the Thai Hotels Association. “We have to create confidence among the Thai society as there’s still a large group of people hesitant about foreign travelers. If other nations are still hesitant, they can come and look at the Thai Test & Go model.”

Mr. Prayuth’s government expects 5 million foreign visitors this year, with the majority of arrivals expected from Europe and the US, and the numbers may reach 9 million if Chinese and Indian tourists return, according to spokesman Thanakorn Wangboonkongchana.

The outlook will remain hazy for the next few months, especially in terms of attracting travelers from China, the biggest group of visitors to Thailand before COVID, accord-

All you need to get a quarantine-free visa:

- A COVID-19 vaccination/recovery certificate issued at least 14 days before travel if you are 18 years or older
 - Those aged between 12-17 should have had at least one dose of vaccine
 - A negative RT-PCR test result taken within 72 hours of travel
 - A COVID insurance cover worth at least \$50,000
- Proof of payment for two separate nights of accommodation and RT-PCR tests
- Download and install government tracking application MorChana

ing to Tim Leelahaphan, a Bangkok-based economist at Standard Chartered Plc. Still, the reopening should help Thailand swing back to a current-account surplus of about 1.5% of GDP this year, although the level will be below the average before the pandemic, he said in a report.

Thailand has experimented with several plans over the past two years to revive the travel sector, which attracted 40 million foreign tourists and generated more than \$60 billion in 2019. About 350,000 visitors took advantage of the first phase of the Test & Go program before it was suspended in late December to prevent the spread of Omicron variant.

“Thailand is among the world’s top tourist destinations because of all the beautiful attractions and the value for money,” said Burin Adulwattana, chief economist at Bangkok Bank Plc. “But the government should try to instill confidence among travelers that the policies won’t change again.” — *Bloomberg*

JOB VACANCY

Company Name and Address:
SODEXO ON-SITE SERVICES PHILIPPINES, INC.
11/F BA Lepanto Bldg., 8747 Paseo De Roxas, Bel-Air, Makati City

Contact details of company: Amy.Herrera@sodexo.com
Available Job Vacancy: 1
Position: Admin Consultant 2

- Job Description:**
1. Accommodation
 - Mastering the overall process of accommodation allowance, including qualification application notification and approval, monthly accommodation check and data validation, one-time relocation expense reimbursement and transfer compensation application.
 - Have the ability to command EAS system and communicate with HQ about issues and updates, approve Chinese Expts qualification and monitor monthly applications in the system.
 - Prepare monthly accommodation allowance data, including automatically integrated data and manual data for validation with HR and payroll specialist.
 - File the leasing contracts of Chinese Expts and record all the information in excel files, update the community information twice a month and timely notify the expats who are intended to rent or relocate as per anti-pandemic strategy.
 - Collect condo leasing information and publish regularly on the platform and wechat group.
 - Make publicity once there are new regulations published, system switch or BCG related report.
 - Ready to answer accommodation related questions from employees and offer correct guidance.
 2. Canteen Procurement
 - Place daily foodstuff orders to suppliers according to chefs’ requests, communicate with suppliers about price, marketing status and other related issues, and ensure orders are delivered timely.
 - Record price, delivered qty, total amount and supplier information in the excel file as per delivery receipt or sales invoice and give support to secretary of SLMC on monthly accounting of canteen foodstuff.
 - Have a basic knowledge of local foodstuff market and Chinese cuisines, able to source major supplier and do the business negotiation, and command supplier accreditation and report process.
 - Calculate monthly salt and oil consumption in the canteen, make food budget when there is any Chinese traditional Festival activity, and communicate with both driver and employees about regional meal delivery.
 3. Others
 - Grasp the whole process of sporadic procurement acceptance, and contact SM Store or Mandarin Supermarket for requests.
 - Report to HQ about covid-19 positive cases and make the records.
 - Able to react responsively once there are any other tasks requests from Admin Manager.

Qualifications:

- Fluent in both Mandarin and English.
- Kind, patient and careful
- Willing to help employees in good attitude

Salary Range: PHP 154,910.57 Monthly with PHP 3,883.33 monthly allowance