

OPINION

The value of clinical trials

The research and development of a new medicine or vaccine is a long and complex process which could last from 10 to 15 years. A crucial part of this discovery and development process is called a clinical trial, the various phases of which entail rigorous studies designed to determine safety and efficacy.

In fact, all the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccines and treatments being used to protect adults and children from the potentially fatal virus went through the extensive clinical trial process. All other lifesaving medicines and vaccines for other diseases have also been part of clinical trials.

Clinical trials are carefully designed studies that establish the benefits and risks of a medical treatment or intervention, according to the Pharmaceutical Research Manufacturers of America (PhRMA).

Following a rigorous screening and preclinical testing process, a pharmaceutical company that wants to bring a drug to market will file an Investigational New Drug (IND) application with regulators, which enables the IND to be tested in human volunteers in clinical trials. In every clinical trial, respecting and protecting the safety of volunteers is of the highest importance.

Under the UK National Institutes for Health (NIH), a Phase I trial tests an investigational drug on a small group of often healthy people to determine its safety and side effects as well as find the correct drug dosage. A Phase II clinical trial, on the other hand, involves up to 300 participants. The emphasis at this stage is to establish the efficacy of the investigational drug on people who have a certain disease or condition. A Phase III clinical trial, meanwhile, gathers about 3,000 people to study different populations and different dosages. Under Phase III, investigational medicines are studied in combination with other drugs.

In recent years, there is also a strong commitment to enhance representation of diverse participants in clinical trials to determine the safety and efficacy of the investigational drug in people coming from different backgrounds.

A journal published by the NIH highlighted the health and scientific benefits of clinical trials, foremost among them allowing participating patients to play an active role in their own healthcare. Participants also have access to innovative research treatments before they are widely available. Moreover, clinical trials increase the options for treatment when standard therapy has failed.

The journal added that clinical trials likewise help patients obtain expert medical care at leading healthcare facilities during the trial. In the bigger picture, they help others by contributing to the advancement of medical knowledge that will benefit more patients.

During his recent visit in Manila, Roche Pharmaceuticals Global Chief Executive Officer (CEO), William "Bill" Anderson noted that the company allotted \$16.1 billion for research and development in 2021.

"Clinical trials aren't just of scientific importance; they are also a means to broaden patient access to innovative, life-saving treatments," he said.

Beyond the health benefits, clinical trials translate to investments that have positive economic impact on the country. These economic benefits include direct investments made by biopharmaceutical companies to identify and operate clinical trial sites; hire staff and contractors; recruit, retain and treat participants; and conduct clinical trial protocols and activities, including monitoring research sites.

The Philippines, in an earlier study, ranked third when it comes to clinical trials following Singapore and Thailand. For his part, Mr. Anderson said that Roche has a strong clinical trial footprint in the Philippines.

Roche Philippines General Manager Dr. Diana Edralin said that the company has conducted at least 20 clinical trials in the Philippines, many of them on cancer. She added that the company has also supported clinical studies related to severe COVID-19.

At the moment, there are three Roche global clinical trials that the country is participating in. As part of efforts to enhance clinical trials in the country, Dr. Edralin said that they are supporting Good Clinical Practice (GCP) guidelines training and accreditation for local institutions.

Mr. Anderson, meanwhile, expressed the Swiss company's ambition to double the medical advances they bring to patients at half the cost to society. He noted that in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) where half the world's population live, the medical advances available in many countries are still beyond the reach of the people.

He lauded legislators and the Philippine government for enacting the Universal Health Care Act, National Integrated Cancer Control Act and Rare Diseases Act. As in other countries, he stressed that healthcare access and affordability gaps remain.

"None of us alone can fix this. We each have great intentions, but we need to work together to address the root causes."

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.



From message to meme:

Study shows how bullying escalates on social media

By Patricia B. Mirasol
Reporter



ONLINE BULLYING and harassment among Filipino youth has three dimensions, according to a two-year study by De La Salle University (DLSU): it can be aimed not only at individuals but also at groups and ideas; it can be either direct or veiled; and it can escalate from a private chat to a public meme.

Preventing and mitigating online bullying necessitates the creation of social collective mechanisms for validation and support, said Jason Vincent A. Cabañes, a co-investigator of the project and DLSU professor of communication, in the July 8 launch of *How Filipino Youth Identify and Act on Bullying and Harassment on Social Media*.

"We cannot put all the responsibility on the young," Mr. Cabañes said. "We need to create an environment that will help them set healthy boundaries. We need to create schools where the youth will feel recognized, and where they will learn to acknowledge when something [constitutes] bullying. This extends to the home as well ... for parents to not be dismissive and say, 'Weak *ka lang* [you're just weak].'"

"There has to be recognition all around so young people will feel empowered," he added.

The project team created infographics for both schools and

parents to know what online bullying and harassment is and how to prevent it.

SELF-AWARENESS, SENSITIVITY

Self-awareness, coupled with sensitivity to others, is key to setting healthy boundaries. An educational video created by DLSU shows that bullying takes many forms, including jokes that seem friendly.

Victims will not be able to act on bullying incidents if they dismiss their feelings, according to Cheryll Ruth R. Soriano, the project's principal investigator and a professor in the department of communication at DLSU. Perpetrators, meanwhile, will not realize they are already inflicting harm.

Ms. Soriano added that dismissing experiences because they do not meet traditional definitions (such as being deliberate, repetitive, or directly aggressive) may lead to the neglect of the bullying's impact, and the victim's capacity to speak about it.

"If they do not recognize [certain acts] as bullying, then that diffuses the responsibility," Ms. Soriano said, adding that liking a

comment in a group chat can be hurtful in some contexts.

VIRTUAL SAFE SPACES

Bullying can escalate from one-on-one messaging to free-for-all online platforms because social media is scalable, networked, and persistent, said Mr. Cabañes. One node connects to others, which can then result in the endless circulation of posts and being "canceled."

"We are also entering an era where our relationship to the past is out of our control," he added. "There are many virtually unerasable acts online."

Allan B.I. Bernardo, a psychology professor at DLSU, noted that safe spaces are more difficult to create online. "There is a world out there that is harsh and mean," he said. "When we talk about empowering people, we also need to help them deal with this harshness. How do we prepare them for this?"

The two-year research involved interviews with 152 Filipino youth between the ages of 15 and 24 from Metro Manila, Batangas in Luzon, Negros Occidental in Visayas, and Misamis Occidental in Mindanao.

Shopping for 'Green Finds' made easier at SM Store

Consumers have been increasingly considering the sustainable practices of brands and their products. From the materials used, the production process, to the packaging, many consumers are becoming conscious of sustainability as they shop and make a purchase.

As the country's leading retailer, SM Retail, Inc. makes shopping for sustainable products easier for consumers with the launch of SM Green Finds.

"The Green Finds initiative is about bringing together our suppliers, our partners in green living, and the consumers so that we make green and eco-friendly products more accessible," said Catherine Iletto, vice-president for corporate communications at SM Retail.

By having the Green Finds badge on eco-friendly products, shoppers can easily see the sustainable choices, which are made using natural ingredients or green technology, and support local communities.

Green Finds is SM Retail's contribution to the SM Green Movement, said Ms. Iletto. "This is really

all about advocating for a greener lifestyle and finding opportunities to push sustainability to our consumers, even through our retail affiliates like Watsons, Ace Hardware, Body Shop, and Kultura. Currently, as we launch the SM Green Finds, we already have 3,000 SKUs that are considered eco-friendly, and are sustainably sourced," she said.

SM offers various green finds through its Home, Fashion, and Beauty departments, such as kitchenware made from high-quality bamboo or tableware from acacia wood, fashion pieces from recycled materials, and clean beauty products free from harmful chemicals.

Its retail affiliates also offer eco-friendly options, made of natural ingredients or produced by social enterprises. Kultura, for instance, is known for its handcrafted products made by artisans and social enterprises that use locally sourced materials such as abaca, bamboo, and rattan.

Currently, customers can look for the Green Finds badge at the SM Store in SM Mall of Asia until August 26. But very soon SM will roll

out this initiative in more SM Stores across the country.

Ms. Iletto said, "The intention is to embed Green Finds within the individual selling pads and even across the retail affiliates."

By making sustainable and eco-friendly products accessible to shoppers through Green Finds, SM wants to support customers to take first steps towards greener lifestyle choices. And at the same time, through this initiative, SM hopes to encourage its suppliers to employ greener means of production.

Sustainability at SM

Aside from supporting sustainability through the products displayed in its stores, SM also builds sustainability within the workplace.

In fact, the SM Retail Headquarters itself is designed with sustainability in mind.

The two-tower, 14-storey office features sustainable and healthy workspaces. The building has facilities that support collaboration among employees, as well as a space for meditation, a gym, nap room, chapel, and a sky garden teeming with varieties of trees and plants.



The SM Retail Headquarters is designed with sustainability in mind.

The office building has also received its WELL Health-Safety Rating, from International WELL Building Institute, for facility operations for cleaning and sanitization procedures, air and water quality management, emergency preparedness programs, and innovation.

Furthermore, SM Retail's new office is made energy-efficient, utilizing an automated lighting systems for a lower power consumption, use of Insulating Glass Unit (IGU) to keep the building cooler and lessen noise transmission. It also has water recycling plant and proper waste management facilities.

It commits to ensuring that more than half the energy used in its properties comes from renewable sources, as well as developing efficient LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) buildings.

"We built the SM Retail Headquarters compliant with international standards for sustainable development because the well-being of our



SM Retail, Inc. launches SM Green Finds to make shopping for sustainable products easier for consumers.

employees and customers inside the building is of utmost importance," said Architect Luis Lava, Workplace and Administration head of SMRI.

Wherever it can, SM endeavors to act as an advocate of sustainability. Koleen Palaganas, vice-president and group head for Sustainability, said, "SM also supports sustainable practices through its

ongoing programs that involve planting trees and mangroves, and protecting marine species and birds. It also seeks to share knowledge about sustainability, educating our employees by running the largest sustainability school in the country, and hosting sustainability conferences with other leading companies, government and nongovernment agencies."



Catherine Iletto, vice-president for corporate communications at SM Retail, Inc.