



FREPIK

A CHATBOT designed to complete administrative tasks will roll out in more communities as part of a joint effort between Save the Children Philippines and Johnson & Johnson Philippines, Inc., to improve newborn and maternal healthcare.

“Introducing chatbots into the healthcare system can support the healthcare professional-patient relationship, as this helps residents to be able to access health information, and book appointments more efficiently,” said Riel S. Andaluz, senior manager for partnerships at Save the Children Philippines, in an e-mail.

Target communities are located in Taguig, Muntinlupa, Pateros, and Parañaque in the National Capital Region; and in Cotabato City, Shariff Aguak, and Datu Odin Sinsuat in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

“Adapting technology into the health units’ processes can support HCWs [healthcare workers] to significantly lessen their workloads, by offloading repetitive processes to the chatbot,” she added.

Chatbot to help deliver maternal health services

Since it went live in October 2021, the chatbot developed by reach52, a health-tech platform, has been used by 87 HCWs across four barangays to book appointments for patients. It has recorded 182 engagements to date.

Of the 144 individuals that successfully booked appointments via the bot, about 95.8% opted for prenatal checkup while around 2.8% preferred a postpartum checkup.

“Due to the pandemic, numerous services, including the provision of public health services, are under strain,” Ms. Andaluz told *BusinessWorld*. “This especially can impact the more vulnerable communities.”

The chatbot is part of a larger three-year project launched in 2021 by Save the Children Philippines and

Johnson & Johnson Philippines, Inc., which aims to help pregnant women and women of reproductive age by reducing information barriers.

“We’re looking forward to continue building on our joint commitment with J&J Philippines to inspire innovation for children most in need,” said Ms. Andaluz. “Through this partnership, we are helping more children and moms have healthier and happier lives.”

In 2022, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported 468 maternal deaths in the first six months of 2022, an increase from 425 maternal deaths the year prior. — **Brontë H. Lacsamana**

OPINION

Enabling vaccine and medicine innovation

During the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, intellectual property (IP) offices supported the fastest development and scale-up of safe and effective vaccines in history, with 13.9 billion COVID-19 vaccines produced to date. The IP framework has provided the basis for more than 380 voluntary partnerships for COVID-19 vaccines to be set up in record time, 88% of which involve technology transfer.

With more than 8,400 drugs in development across all therapeutic fields, the biopharmaceutical industry drives exploratory research, taking care of translating early research into patient-ready treatments, according to the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA).

In the last 20 years, the industry has developed over 650 new medicines for the world’s emerging health needs, focusing on treatment for the various cancers, cardiovascular diseases, and diabetes, among others.

Innovation ecosystems are sustainable when governments, research institutions, and the private

sector collectively address the elements necessary to drive investments in new technology and science, underpinned by a stable and transparent rule of law and an incentive system to attract the right people, expertise, and investment.

Open dialogue and collaboration with all stakeholders, including the private sector, is critical to the process to create policies that support the emergence of sustainable innovation ecosystems.

TAKING RISKS

Innovation in technology-dependent sectors requires a significant risk appetite. However, without innovation, there would not be any advancement in science and the arts. Recognizing this dichotomy early on, countries have rewarded and incentivized researchers through the IP system to undertake the risks needed to provide the solutions.

Thus, effective and predictable IP systems have proven to provide an important incentive for investing in innovation and enable innovative ideas to be made available and scaled.

A stable IP system provides the certainty necessary to build confidence for investments in the creation of technologies. Intellectual property incentives also support technological partnerships by providing the legal framework necessary for collaborative innovation and the exchange of technology and knowledge.

Effective IP regimes bring clarity and certainty to the market, encouraging the introduction of technology to new places and enabling innovative ideas to be scaled. It lends confidence in the country to its people that their rights are protected.

As shown by recent studies, a strong IP system and protection allows faster launch and access to new medicines for patients across the world, both in developing and developed countries. In fact, having a strong IP system allows for incentives for the introduction of many medicines which would not be otherwise available.

With the success rate of clinical trials being less than 12%, inventing, developing, and launching new medicines is a long, resource-intensive and risky process. However, despite setbacks, risks and uncertainty, the industry

continues to invest in pharmaceutical research and development (R&D).

The temporary and limited period of protection given by patents is part of the factors incentivizing the industry to keep investing in the uncertain and long process that is pharmaceutical R&D. In return for this limited protection, the IP system requires the patent applicant to publicly disclose the invention to allow others to learn and build upon prior advances, creating a perfectly balanced policy system.

Effective intellectual property systems — including protection of patents, trademarks, and proprietary data — are critical for stimulating R&D. They provide some assurance that, if a new medicine is successfully approved, the innovator has a chance to generate revenues sufficient enough to justify the investments in R&D and ensure sustainable innovation into the future.

Medical technologies that benefit patients and manufacturers alike are possible only with huge R&D investments and the protection of intellectual property that make those investments feasible.

Innovation in the biopharmaceutical industry is about creating and improv-

ing medicines and vaccines for patients who need them, and allowing the greatest choice of treatments for doctors with health outcomes that matter. It happens when we challenge the status quo and the “business as usual” realities.

Most of the innovations brought in by our industry are born from rigor, discipline, risks taking, time, money, and collaboration. A successful innovation process is one that minimizes the time and cost needed to translate a scientific “idea” to an approved new, safe, and effective medicine or vaccine that ultimately will benefit patients.

TEODORO B. PADILLA is the executive director of the 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.



MEDICINE CABINET

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