

# Data project to support breast cancer control program

Circle of Life, a data and digital infrastructure project, was launched this January to support an early breast cancer detection program and provide analytics.

The project being piloted in Taguig City will help local government officials make data-driven decisions and provide quantitative data when requesting for healthcare-related funding at the local and national levels, according to Kara Magsanoc-Alikpala, founding president of breast cancer advocacy group ICanServe Foundation and vice-president for internal affairs of Cancer Coalition Philippines.

Joining ICanServe Foundation in the multi-stakeholder collaboration are Taguig City; local healthcare software startup Dashlabs.ai; and innovative medicines company Novartis, which is headquartered in Switzerland.

Launched in the presence of Swiss Ambassador to the Philippines Alain Gaschen, Circle of Life supports ICanServe's Ating Dibdibin program by generating analytics that can help identify gaps in cancer care and enhance monitoring and evaluation.

Meanwhile, Ating Dibdibin, which rolled out in 2008, has expanded into a full-scale breast cancer control program in ICanServe's partner cities, including Marikina, Muntinlupa, and Taguig in Metro Manila; and Panabo and Tagum in Davao del Norte.

Ating Dibdibin promotes early detection, early diagnosis, access to timely and quality care, supportive care, palliative care, and patient navigation.

To sustain Ating Dibdibin, Taguig City, under the leadership of Mayor Lani L. Cayetano, passed an ordinance allocating funds and committing logistics and personnel to the program. Community health workers (CHWs), nurses, midwives, and doctors are trained on early breast cancer detection; CHWs are also trained to serve as patient navigators.

Through the program, the number of days between diagnosis and first day of treatment has been reduced from 10 months to 2 months or less.

## INTEGRATED APPROACH

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among Filipino women, and the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the country.

Adequate cancer care needs an integrated approach which should entail working throughout the whole continuum of care — from prevention, diagnosis, to treatment. An integrated approach involving multistakeholder collaboration is key in cancer prevention and control.

The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasized that breast cancer most commonly presents as a painless lump or thickening in the breast.

With this, women who find an abnormal lump in the breast must consult a health practitioner without a delay of more than one to two months even when there is no pain associated with it.

The WHO added that it will be important for women to seek medical attention at the first sign of a potential symptom to allow for more successful treatment.

"We face daunting challenges in the healthcare sector. But when we start working with patient groups, civil society organizations and local government units, definitely the problem becomes bite-sized and solvable, especially when there are strongly committed stakeholders," said Assistant Secretary Beverly Lorraine C. Ho, Director for Health Promotion and Communication Service at the DoH.

Ating Dibdibin is one of two entries from Filipino patient organizations that were judged the inaugural winners of the 2022 Alliance and Partnerships for Patient Innovation and Solutions (APPIS) Innovator Program.

## MEDICINE CABINET TEODORO B. PADILLA

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.



# Guitar lessons seen to improve hand mobility in stroke patients

By Patricia B. Mirasol Reporter

GUITAR exercises can help rehabilitate hand function among stroke patients with unilateral hand impairment, according to a study.

Project G.T.A.R.A., or "Grip/Grasp Training with Active Range of Motion Activities using Guitar," is a set of guitar exercises similar to those used in traditional occupational therapy sessions for patients with one impaired hand and one normally functioning hand.

The P3-million project, which ended December 2022, was funded by the Department of Science and Technology-Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (DoST-PCHRD) and developed by the University of the Philippines Diliman-College of Music (UPCMu).

Evaluation of the project results is ongoing.

"This partnership with UPCMmu aims to capitalize on the benefits of leveraging music therapy as a rehabilitation strategy for patients," said Dr. Jaime C. Montoya, DoST-PCHRD executive director, in a Jan. 20 statement.

"If successful, this project can contribute to the recovery of our stroke patients with hand impairments, and enable them to perform their tasks normally," he added.

The eight-week treatment session culminated in a guitar presentation on Dec. 17 featuring seven of the 17 study participants at the UPCMmu's Mini Hall. The performances, according to the DoST-PCHRD, demonstrated the benefits of utilizing the guitar methods curated by the project team for chronic stroke patients.

The idea behind G.T.A.R.A. was born in a UPCMmu class in 2017 led by Professor Nathan V. Manimtim and a conversation on *Classical Guitar Pedagogy – A Handbook for Teachers*, a book written by classical guitarist and composer Anthony Glise.

Daniel Joseph S. Morabe, a UPCMmu alumnus and G.T.A.R.A. project team member, said that the Glise book is unique

because it discusses the effect of the different guitar playing techniques on the body and health of the guitarist.

After observing patients in the occupational therapy ward of the Philippine General Hospital, Mr. Morabe saw the rehabilitative potential of guitar exercises.

Mr. Manimtim, Mr. Morabe's former professor and G.T.A.R.A. project leader, explained in a Jan. 23 e-mail: "To test whether these similarities [between therapy sessions and classical guitar techniques] were merely superficial or have a deeper connection, Dr. Kreza G. Ligaya — who was a resident physician of Rehabilitation Medicine at that time — invited a stroke patient with right-hand deficiency to participate in a pilot study on the use of specially designed guitar-playing exercises by Mr. Morabe and myself."

The improvement seen on this stroke patient's quality of movement prompted the project proponents to form a team of doctors and musicians to conduct a more comprehensive study.

# WHO urges 'immediate action' after cough syrup deaths PHL among flagged countries

LONDON — The World Health Organization (WHO) has called for "immediate and concerted action" to protect children from contaminated medicines after a spate of child deaths linked to cough syrups last year.

In 2022, more than 300 children — mainly aged under 5 — in Gambia, Indonesia, and Uzbekistan died of acute kidney injury, in deaths that were associated with contaminated medicines, the WHO said in a statement on Monday.

The medicines, over-the-counter cough syrups, had high levels of diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol.

"These contaminants are toxic chemicals used as industrial solvents and antifreeze agents

that can be fatal even taken in small amounts, and should never be found in medicines," the WHO said.

As well as the countries above, the WHO told Reuters on Monday that the Philippines, Timor Leste, Senegal and Cambodia may potentially be impacted because they may have the medicines on sale. It called for action across its 194 member states to prevent more deaths.

(Related story: "P&G recalls Sangobion Kids due to toxic substance," BusinessWorld, Dec. 14, 2022)

"Since these are not isolated incidents, WHO calls on various key stakeholders engaged in the medical supply chain to take immediate and coordinated action," WHO said.

The WHO has already sent specific product alerts in October and earlier this month, asking for the medicines to be removed from the shelves, for cough syrups made by India's Maiden Pharmaceuticals and Marion Biotech, which are linked with deaths in Gambia and Uzbekistan respectively.

It also issued a warning last year for cough syrups made by four Indonesian manufacturers, PT Yarindo Farmatama, PT Universal Pharmaceutical, PT Konimex and PT AFI Pharma, that were sold domestically.

The companies involved have either denied that their products have been contaminated or declined to comment while investigations are ongoing. — Reuters

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