

OPINION

Senior citizens and pneumonia vaccine

All Filipino senior citizens aged 60 years old and above must receive one dose of pneumococcal vaccine throughout their lifetime to help lower their risk of contracting pneumonia and to reduce its severity if they do get the disease.

Health experts and senior citizen advocates issued this appeal during the recent forum entitled “*Bakunado si Lolo at Lola, Iwas Pulmonya*” with the support of MSD Philippines and the Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP).

Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs that can cause mild to severe illness in people of all ages, but senior citizens are at increased risk of getting infected.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said it is the single-largest infectious cause of death in children worldwide. People at risk for pneumonia also include adults over the age of 65 and people with preexisting health problems, the agency added.

Depending on the severity of the pneumonia, the signs and symptoms may include cough, shortness of breath, fever, sweating and shaking chills, fatigue, chest pain, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea and confusion, especially in older adults. The WHO noted that when a person has pneumonia, the alveoli are filled with pus and fluid, which makes breathing painful and limits oxygen intake.

Unfortunately, while pneumonia can be prevented by vaccination, awareness about the disease is low and only about 20% of the country's senior citizen population has received pneumococcal vaccination.

Pneumonia was the seventh leading cause of death in the Philippines in 2021. Data from the Philippine Health Insurance Corp. (PhilHealth) showed that 737,659 Filipinos sought medical assistance and filed PhilHealth claims due to pneumonia in 2019 amounting to P10.64 billion.

“We urge our senior citizens to avail [themselves] of free pneumococcal vaccination at health centers and public health facilities,” said Allandale Nacino, medical officer IV at the Disease Prevention and Control Bureau of the Department of Health (DoH).

“Pneumococcal vaccination can prevent costly hospitalization and intensive care unit admission,” stressed Arthur Dessi E. Roman, medical specialist III at the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine.

The DoH also recommends that senior citizens get the flu vaccine every year. Pneumococcal vaccines and flu shots are now available at local pharmacies and drug-store chains nationwide where these are administered by licensed pharmacists.

“Vaccines are safe and can save lives,” reminded Samir M. Manzanilla, project development officer IV at the National Commission of Senior Citizens, the government agency dedicated to promoting the rights and welfare of Filipino senior citizens.

“Pneumonia is a leading cause of hospitalization and death among senior citizens,” warned Ciriaco Angeles, president of the Provincial Federation of Senior Citizens Association of Cavite, Inc. Noting that many senior citizens have gone online but are still not fully informed about pneumonia, he urged his fellow seniors to learn more about the disease and how to avail themselves of the free pneumonia vaccination at village health centers.

Aside from getting the pneumococcal vaccine, senior citizens can likewise lower their risk for pneumonia by adopting healthy living practices recommended by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Among these are avoiding people who are sick. If a person is sick, stay away from others as much as possible to keep them from getting sick. As in COVID-19 prevention practices, wash your hands regularly, and cough or sneeze into a tissue or into your elbow or sleeve. Clean and disinfect surfaces that are touched a lot such as door handles, light switches, phones, remote controls, toilet flush handles and other shared items. It is also crucial to avoid contact with cigarette smoke or quit smoking. Take good care of medical conditions or comorbidities like asthma, diabetes and heart disease.

The WHO Global Vaccine Action Plan 2011–2020 and Immunization Agenda 2030 and the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing recommend a life-course immunization approach, where everyone, whatever our age or stage of life and wherever we live, can benefit from the health, social and economic advantages of vaccines. This broadening of focus beyond “pediatric vaccination programs” to “vaccination programs for all ages and all groups” is vital for future pandemic preparedness and global health security.

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



MEDICINE CABINET TEODORO B. PADILLA



FREPIK

Economies of scale can lower cancer care costs

LOW- and middle-income countries like the Philippines can lower cancer care costs by adopting economies of scale and standardizing care for a specific clinical problem, according to health experts.

There are cost advantages when specialized centers for cancer are used, said Maria Carissa A. Alejandro, chief public health officer at Ayala Healthcare Holdings, Inc.

“You can buy medicines and equipment at a cheaper price,” she told a cancer summit in Filipino on Feb. 24. “Doctors and nurses also get better at what they do, reducing the time it takes them to do their job.”

Clinical pathways, which are patient care algorithms based on the best evidence, are also important because they help reduce unnecessary tests or medicines.

Using more generic drugs will also encourage patients to complete an otherwise expensive treatment.

A study on cancer patients in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations found that 48% had experienced a financial catastrophe a year after their diagnosis. A further 29% died within 12 months after they found out they had cancer.

In the Philippines, cancer is the third leading cause of death. “Many get diagnosed with cancer at a late stage,” Ms. Alejandro said. “That is the reality in the Philippines and other low- and middle-income countries.”

The cited ways for healthcare providers to lower the cost of cancer care. For one, bundling payments for breast cancer treatment had led to 34% in patient savings for United Healthcare, a private healthcare and insurance company in the US.

Bundled payments, which cover most or all of the services involved to treat a patient's medical condition, is said to be the middle ground between traditional fee-for-service payments that entail little financial risk for providers and full capitation, where a provider assumes almost full financial risk.

Introducing a doctor's compensation scheme that combines fee-for-service with a variable component based on performance metrics might also work, Ms. Alejandro said.

Many of the bigger changes in cancer care started as a proof of concept, she told the cancer summit.

“Somebody [acted on] an idea... which eventually led to broader policy and systemic changes.” — Patricia B. Mirasol

Hall of Fame Outstanding Developer Megaworld reaps major awards from FIABCI

By Jean Flores

Property giant Megaworld Corporation, the only real estate company to be given the ‘Hall of Fame’ Outstanding Developer distinction by FIABCI Philippines, continued its winning ways by taking home five major awards at this year's Property and Real Estate Excellence Awards held recently at Sofitel Philippine Plaza in Pasay City.

The company won three Gold Awards for Alabang West Parade in Las Piñas City (Retail Category), the newly opened Belmont Hotel Mactan in Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu (Hotel Category), and The Upper East in Bacolod City (Master Plan Category), and two Silver Awards for the 17-storey One Paseo in Arcovia City (Office Category) and the Bacolod Murcia Milling Company (BMMC) Train at The Upper East in Bacolod City (Specialized Project or Purpose-Built Category).

This latest set of recognitions are all first-time property awards won by Megaworld for the said properties.

Alabang West Parade takes pride in being the newest dining and lifestyle hub south of Metro Manila within the 62-hectare Alabang West along Daanghari Road in Las Piñas City. The 17-storey One Paseo, on the other hand, proudly stands as the first-ever office building to rise inside the 12.3-hectare Arcovia City in Pasig, and was recently received a Gold LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environment Design) certification from the U.S. Green Building Council and Green Business Certification, Inc.

Late last year, the 34-hectare The Upper East in Bacolod City was formally inaugurated by no



Receiving the first-ever property award for Megaworld Lifestyle Malls' Alabang West Parade are General Manager Sheila Cervan and Leasing Manager Athena Isorena (2nd from right)



The list of award-winning Megaworld properties continues to grow with the addition of the five new property awards from FIABCI Philippines. Representing Megaworld during the gala night were (from L-R): Joseph Aldous Hizon, leasing manager, Megaworld Premier Offices; Eric Enriquez, vice-president, Megaworld Premier Offices; Shiela Cervan of Alabang West Parade; Cleofe Albiso, managing director, Megaworld Hotels and Resorts; and Johnson del Valle, general manager, Belmont Hotel Mactan.

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less than Philippine President Ferdinand “Bongbong” R. Marcos, Jr. in a ceremony held during the last weekend of the Maskara Festival. During this popular festival, visitors of the township also saw the century old BMMC Train for the first time as a key feature of the open park that forms part of what is dubbed as “the Philippines’ most beautiful McDonald’s store.”

The 550-room Belmont Hotel Mactan, meanwhile, opened in November 2022 as the second homegrown hotel brand under Megaworld Hotels & Resorts inside the 30-hectare The Mactan Newtown in Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu.

In 2018, Megaworld punctuated its industry dominance by winning the first-ever Hall of Fame Award as “Outstanding Developer of the Year” from FIABCI Philippines following three straight years of winning the “Best Developer Award” since 2015. During that same year, Megaworld chairman Dr. Andrew L. Tan was also awarded the coveted Hall of Fame award for “Property Man of the Year” after receiving such award for three consecutive years.

Since first taking part in the prestigious awards event eight years ago, the company has brought home a total of 67 recognitions from FIABCI Philippines.

The Property and Real Estate Excellence Awards is a prestigious annual property competition organized by the Paris-based International Real Estate Federation of the Philippines (FIABCI Philippines International), which is composed of topnotch developers, respected members of the academe, real estate professionals, and public sector executives.