

Lyceum, Asian Eye tie up to boost optometry course

LYCEUM of the Philippines - St. Cabrini's School of Health Sciences, Inc. and the Asian Eye Institute have partnered to improve the school's optometry program, the institute said in a statement.

The tie-up aims to develop graduates that have more clinical experience in response to the needs of modern optical practice, it said.

"We at Asian Eye Institute believe that we can provide the technical assistance to build a program that will develop optometry graduates with skills that will be valuable in their clinical practice," President

Joaquin E. Quintos IV said in the statement.

The eye center and research institute welcomes clinical interns from different schools to hone their expertise and interpersonal skills through rotations within its clinical network.

This partnership aligns with Lyceum's commitment to provide globally competitive learners to industries, according to Brigido L. Carandang, Jr., the school's chief academic officer.

"This collaboration has innovated the optometry program, providing future optometrists with more prac-

tice-focused and hands-on learning," he said in the same statement.

Vision impairment and blindness rank among the major concerns in the Philippines, with a prevalence rate of 1.98%, according to the Health department, citing a 2018 study by the National Institute for Health's Philippine Eye Research Institute.

This represents 1.11 million Filipinos with cataract, 400,000 with uncorrected error of refraction, about 300,000 with glaucoma and 200,000 with maculopathy. There are more than 4 million Filipinos living with undiagnosed eye problems, it said.

An optometrist is the primary healthcare provider for routine eye care. Ophthalmologists, on the other hand, are medical doctors who specialize in surgical eye procedures.

Asian Eye aims to implement an optometry program that allows students to become job-ready at every stage of their education, the institute said.

The program has 41 students, with the inaugural batch in their fifth year. It will produce its first set of graduates in 2025.

Lyceum opened its College of Optometry and College of Medicine in 2018. — **Patricia B. Mirasol**



AN OPTOMETRIST works on a patient.

PHILIPPINE STAR/MICHAEL MARCOS

OPINION

Sustainable healthcare

A group of healthcare professionals recently expressed a belief that, as far as they are concerned, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has come to an end.

One of the officials of the Philippine College of Physicians has said the pandemic is already over because they are no longer seeing too many cases of COVID-19 on the ground.

The official added that their group was just waiting for the World Health Organization (WHO) to make an official announcement about the status of COVID-19, which has infected more than 760 million people and killed more than 6.8 million people globally.

As of the weekly epidemiological update by the WHO, more than 3.7 million new cases and more than 26,000 deaths were reported worldwide on Feb. 20 to March 19. While these figures showed a sharp decline in cases and deaths, the WHO said there are significant regional differences, including increases in some areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has overwhelmed and overburdened healthcare systems worldwide, has made a compelling case for the global community to take notice and action.

Amid the country's continuing recovery from the socioeconomic and health impact of this pandemic, there is progressive realization on the need to strengthen the healthcare system and make the efforts sustainable.

With several countries moving on from the pandemic, there is also recognition that it is high time to shift the focus to other equally pressing health concerns.

"Six of the 10 diseases that caused the most deaths

in the Philippines in 2019 were noncommunicable diseases, with ischemic heart disease and stroke occupying the top two spots," Lotis Ramin, president of AstraZeneca and concurrent president of the

PHAPCares Foundation, told a recent forum.

The other noncommunicable diseases on the top 10 list are chronic kidney disease, diabetes, hypertensive heart disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, she said.

More than seven million Filipinos had been diagnosed with stage 3 chronic kidney disease or even higher in 2021; 19,000 new cases of lung cancer were diagnosed in the country in 2020; and 11 million Filipinos are suffering from asthma, Ms. Ramin said, citing statistics from global studies.

Unfortunately for the last three years, noncommunicable diseases had to be deprioritized to address the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic. With these figures, it's time to bring the attention back to the equally serious problem of noncommunicable diseases, which account for 68% of deaths in the Philippines.

Close to 50% of healthcare expenditure in the country is out of pocket, which is very challenging especially for those in the lower socioeconomic bracket.

Ms. Ramin stressed that addressing the huge unmet needs in healthcare in the country requires government and private sector partnership to maximize resources and innovative approaches.

An encouraging development is the inclusion of healthcare in the Marcos government's eight-point socioeconomic agenda. The innovative biopharmaceutical industry, which has also been in the forefront of COVID-19 efforts, looks forward to building stronger partnerships with the government to support this agenda and improve healthcare access for Filipinos, Ms. Ramin said.

At the same forum, Diana Edralin, general manager of Roche and president of the Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP), said investing in healthcare should not be

seen as a burden or cost, but rather as a human capital investment that drives economic growth.

With improved healthcare and a healthy population, production losses due to absenteeism and tardiness, as well as those from frailty and fatigue, are reduced, the doctor said. Children can also become smarter and stronger, and grow up to become more competent adults, she said.

Ms. Edralin presented the industry's proposed whole-of-systems approach toward sustainable healthcare. To promote early detection, screening and prevention, the industry aims to elicit the participation of local government units through public-private partnerships (PPPs), as well as to continue partnering with patient groups in line with their patient-centric thrust.

Another area for partnership is the continued conduct of clinical trials to generate local data and provide Filipino patients with early access to treatment.

Clinical trials are carefully designed studies that establish the benefits and risks of a medical treatment or intervention. Beyond the health benefits, they 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.

A further area of collaboration is the continued updating of the Philippine National Formulary through a dynamic health technology assessment process that will make innovative and life-saving treatments available in public hospitals and other government facilities to lower out-of-pocket costs.

Ms. Edralin recommended three sustainable investments in healthcare that are needed today — increase public investments in health, accelerate the implementation of the Universal Health Care Act and the National Integrated Cancer Control Act, and expand the innovation mindset and public-private partnerships in health.

TEODORO B. PADILLA is the executive director of the 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.



Philippines set to receive first-ever LNG cargo for power generation

THE Philippines has bought its first-ever liquefied natural gas (LNG) cargo, which will be delivered this month, bound for a new terminal that will fuel a 1,200-megawatt (MW) power plant, global energy trader Vitol said on Monday.

Vitol Asia Pte. Ltd., a supply and trading unit of Vitol Group, will supply the LNG cargo to San Miguel Global Power Holdings Corp. from its global LNG portfolio, Vitol said in a statement.

It did not disclose the volume and price.

The purchase comes after spot LNG prices in Asia fell sharply from all-time highs last year when Russia cut gas supplies to Europe following the Ukraine war and sparked a flurry of purchases by European nations.

Faced with declining output from its Malampaya natural gas field, the Philippines is the newest LNG buyer in the region as it seeks alternative fuel supply for existing gas-fired power plants producing more than 3,000 MW, including San Miguel Global's 1,200-MW Ilijan power plant.

The LNG cargo will be delivered around mid-April to Singapore-based Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific's (AG&P) import terminal in the Philippines.

"This is a significant milestone and we look forward to bringing more LNG supply from around the world to meet the rising gas demand of the Philippines," said Vitol Asia president Mike Muller.

The Ilijan plant in Batangas province, 142 kilometers (88 miles) south of Manila, is among several power generation assets of San Miguel Global, a unit of Philippine conglomerate San Miguel Corp.

Ilijan's power output is expected to significantly augment the country's generation capacity in the face of rapidly increasing post-pandemic demand, Vitol said.

The plant has been undergoing repair works to improve its fuel efficiency and generation ramp rate since last year after gas supply from Malampaya ended, according to San Miguel.

AG&P's import facility will be the first to come online among seven LNG terminal projects approved by the Philippine government. It will have annual capacity of five million tons. — **Reuters**

Century Pacific Food's earnings rise 6% to P5 billion

CENTURY Pacific Food, Inc.'s net income climbed by 6% to P5 billion in 2022 after the food and beverage manufacturer recorded higher revenues driven by the company's branded segment.

"On the profitability side, because of the branded segment's outperformance, we saw a favorable mix impact, which allowed us to sustain gross margins in 2022," Century Pacific Food Chief Financial Officer Richard Kristoffer S. Manapat said in a press release on Tuesday.

The company said that net income for the year was impacted by higher costs of products due to "inflationary pressures."

It reported that its topline grew by 14% to P62.2 billion driven by the performance of its branded business, which is composed of marine, meat, milk, and other emerging businesses. The business segment grew by 16% in 2022.

"Our affordable and accessible brands like Fresca and Lucky 7 allowed the company to serve the needs of value-seeking consumers, especially during an inflationary time," said Mr. Manapat.

Mr. Manapat said local demand remained resilient as more jobs were reported due to the economy's reopening in the previous year.

Operating expenses also increased by 14% driven by higher logistics costs. Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization rose by 6%, the company said, without giving comparative figures.

Century Pacific Food's original equipment manufacturer (OEM) exports business grew 4% from its high base reported a year prior.

"Despite a slow start, the exports business saw improvements in the second half of 2022 due to favorable movements in freight rates, forex, and commodities," the company said.

Century Pacific Food allocated P1.4 billion in capital expenditures

for 2022, which it used to complete a 50% expansion of its coconut OEM facility.

The company also acquired the asset and intellectual property of the canned food company behind the Ligo brand.

"We approach 2023 with cautious optimism focused on delivering top-line and bottom-line growth but cognizant of our consumers' plight, considering persistent inflationary pressures," Mr. Manapat said.

On Tuesday, shares in Century Pacific Food fell by 1.8% or 45 centavos to end at P24.50 apiece. — **Adrian H. Halili**



PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO

Telcos boost efforts for more SIM registrations

TELCO companies are ramping up efforts such as partnering with schools and government units as well as rolling out subscriber identity module (SIM) registration booths as the April 26 deadline draws closer.

Smart Communications, Inc. said that around 3,000 Valenzuelanons registered their SIM cards under its partnership with the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Valenzuela (PLV).

Smart's SIM registration drive in Valenzuela City had 350 student volunteers from PLV who assisted 33 barangays as part of their National Service Training Program.

Meanwhile, Ayala-led Globe Telecom, Inc. announced on Monday that its Globe Stores and Easy Hubs will provide assistance for SIM registration.

Under this initiative, 147 Globe stores and 25 Easy Hubs will be open to help Globe's mobile and broadband customers to register their SIMs.

DITO Telecommunity Corp. has also enhanced its application to simplify the registration process on the platform.

The improvements in DITO App cover the implementation of optical character

recognition that allows automated personal data entry and the increase of DITO numbers that can be processed to five per registration, among others.

Aside from app improvements, DITO will also give two gigabytes of bonus data to its subscribers as soon as they complete the SIM registration process.

In the data provided by the Department of Information Communications Technology, the total number of registered SIMs as of April 2 reached 57.18 million.

This number is around 33.8% of the 168.98 million total subscribers nationwide.

Around 28.97 million of the total number of registered SIMs are Smart users, Globe logged about 23.84 million registered subscribers, and DITO recorded 4.37 million.

Republic Act 11934 or the SIM Registration Act requires all SIM users to register their SIMs under their name until April 26, or risk SIM deactivation.

The law aims to help mitigate the proliferation of text scams and other mobile phone-aided criminal activities. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

ALLIED COMMERCIAL BANK XIAMEN, CHINA 新联商业银行 NOTICE TO ALL SHAREHOLDERS 致全体股东告知书

Notice is hereby given that pursuant to Art. 7 Par. 16 of the Amended Articles of Association and By Laws of Allied Commercial Bank (June 2017 Revision), the annual meeting of the shareholders of Allied Commercial Bank will be held on 22 April 2023 at 10:00 A.M. by Microsoft Teams, for the following purposes:

根据新联商业银行章程(2017年6月修订)第七章第十六条的规定,兹通知新联商业银行股东会会议将于2023年4月22日上午10:00以视频会议方式召开,会议议程如下:

1. Call to Order.
会议召集。
2. Proof of Notice of Meeting/Certification of Quorum.
会议通知证实/法定人数认证。
3. Approval of the Minutes of the Annual Shareholders' Meeting on 14 May 2022.
审批于2022年5月14日召开的年度股东会会议纪要。
4. Annual Report to Shareholders, including related party transactions and the proposed budget for 2023.
向股东作年度报告,包括关联交易,以及2023年的拟议预算。
5. Approval of the External Auditor's Report and Audited Financial Statements for the year 2022.
审批2022年度外部审计报告。
6. Ratification of all Acts, Transactions and Resolutions of the Board of Directors, Executive Committee, Board Committees and Management for the year 2022.
批准2022年银行董事会、执行委员会、董事会下设的专业委员会及管理层的每一行为、事务处理及决议。
7. Report of the Board Supervisor.
监事报告。
8. Appointment of External Auditor for calendar year 2023.
聘请2023年度外部审计机构。
9. Revision of the Articles of Association and By-Laws of Allied Commercial Bank.
新联商业银行章程之修订。
10. Nomination/election of replacement for Director Lee Eng Y. So.
提名/选举苏黎永董事的替换人选。
11. Other Matters.
其它事项。

All shareholders are cordially invited to attend the meeting in person. However, if you cannot personally attend the meeting and you wish to be represented thereat, you may designate your authorized representative by submitting a proxy instrument to the Office of the Chairman at Allied Bank Centre, 6754 Ayala Avenue corner Legaspi Street, Makati City, not later than the close of business on 14 April 2023.

诚意邀请全体股东出席本次会议。然而,如果您无法亲自出席,但有委托他人代理表决的意愿,请不迟于2022年4月14日向董事长办公室, Allied Bank Centre, 6754 Ayala Avenue corner Legaspi Street, Makati, City, Philippines, 送达书面委托。

For and on behalf of
ALLIED COMMERCIAL BANK
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
新联商业银行董事会

(Sgd.)
LUCIO C. TAN, Chairman
陈永毅, 董事长
1 April 2023
2023年4月1日