

DOH plans to regulate prices of chemo medicine, insulin

by SHEILA CRISOSTOMO
Philstar.com

MANILA—The Department of Health (DOH) plans to include chemotherapy drugs and insulin in the list of regulated medicine so the government can control their prices, an official said.

Health Undersecretary Alex Padilla said the department may release the list of regulated medicine before the end of the month.

The list will be submitted to President Arroyo for approval.

"We are looking at cancer drugs for children and insulin to be among the medicine that will be covered by price regulation. We are studying the list very carefully," he told a health forum organized by the Philippine Col-



lege of Physicians.

Controlling medicine prices is mandated under Republic Act 9502 or the Universally Acces-

sible Cheaper and Quality Medicines Act of 2008, which was enacted to provide Filipinos with affordable and quality medicine.

Under this law, subject to price regulation are drugs for chronic illnesses like gastro-intestinal disorder, peptic ulcer, urologic disorder, tuberculosis, asthma, neuro-psychiatric disorder, pulmonary diseases, hypertension and HIV/AIDS, among others.

Padilla said the DOH is following some criteria in identifying drugs that have to be regulated.

For one, he said the department is looking for drugs that are widely in demand but are four to five times more expensive than those sold in neighboring countries.

"For instance, insulin. There is insulin that is being sold here for P1,200 and P800, but abroad its

price is only (equivalent to) P50," he said.

The DOH is also looking at products that are produced or imported by less than four companies. It is also studying how these drugs are being sourced.

Dr. Robert So, program coordinator of the DOH's Pharmaceutical Management Unit, said the department might come up initially with 25 drugs that would be covered by price regulation.

So gave assurance that the DOH is closely coordinating with pharmaceutical companies, consumer groups and other stakeholders in coming up with the list.

He added that before subjecting a product to price control, the DOH wants to check first with the drug companies if they themselves could lower their prices. ■

Gov't pledges more efficient, hands-on info-servicing

MANILA—More than 100 government information officers (GIOs) representing some 50 government agencies last Feb. 13 met for consultations on how they can best service the need of the general public for information on government goings-on.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde opened the afternoon meeting, saying that "in this age of commercial media" where negative and bad news generally take the upper hand, GIOs are handicapped.

The consultations, attended by such familiar GIOs as Malacanang spokespersons Anthony Golez and Lorelei Fajardo, Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Bayani Mangibin, and Lt. Col. Romeo Brawner Jr. of the Philippine Army, were conducted "to rebuild a vast network" of GIOs who would provide or react to issues in real time as much as possible, Remonde said.

Remonde empathized with GIOs who he described as "the people who really know the accomplishments of government and are frustrated to hear nothing good about our government."

"Government deserves better than how we are portrayed by private media outfits," said Remonde.

"This is the challenge that we must address because the role of GIOs in a democracy like ours cannot be underestimated."

To emphasize his point, Remonde said that while GIOs and journalists as a whole should be bringers of good and uplifting news, the reality of the damages inflicted by falsehood should not be taken for granted.

Practiced and relayed the negative way, false or irresponsible journalism is like poison that can kill society—far more destructive than when a bad doctor can send a patient to a morgue and a bungling lawyer his client to prison.

GIOs must be ready to respond to queries from the media, no matter if private practitioners call in the dead of night or ask irreverent questions, Remonde said, "because silence will always be construed as guilt."

At the end of the consultations, Fajardo led the pledge for GIOs to join hands together to "uplift the public image of their respective agencies and government as a whole and the Presidency." ■

GMA helps with efforts to reduce adverse effects of climate change

KIDAPAWAN CITY—President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo will get an update on government's efforts to curb the adverse effects of climate change from Presidential Adviser on Climate Change Heherson Alvarez during her visit to this city.

The President will arrive tomorrow morning in this capital city of North Cotabato with her visit focused on environmental protection and the peace process in Mindanao.

The President took over the chairmanship of the Presidential Task Force on Climate Change last January in a move to strengthen government's efforts to urgently respond to the far-reaching effects of climate change to the nation's food security, human health, water supply,

and economic development.

Furthermore, the President wanted to consolidate all government efforts to move in one direction so the country will have a cohesive and integrated action framework against climate change.

The holding of the briefing on climate change in this city is significant as the province of North Cotabato has been one of the several areas in Mindanao that suffered massive flooding.

Experts said just like anywhere in the world, the Philippines has been experiencing temperature spikes brought about by climate change.

It has been observed that warming is experienced most in the northern and southern regions of the country (northern Luzon and Mindanao) while

Metro Manila has warmed less than most parts.

Extreme weather conditions have also occurred more frequently since 1980. These include deadly and damaging typhoons, floods, landslides, severe El Niño and La Niña phenomena, drought, and forest fires.

Adversely affected sectors include agriculture, and marine resources.

The event is the second time it was held outside Metro Manila. The first one was held in Nueva Ecija before she flew to Davos, Switzerland end of January. ■

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