

Why DoH kept swine flu death secret

by DONA PAZZIBUGAN
Inquirer.net

MANILA—As part of its protocol, the Department of Health (DOH) did not inform the House of Representatives that the death of one of its staff members was related to the swine flu virus, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said Tuesday, June 23.

"I explained to them that we couldn't announce the identity beforehand because it's our protocol, so the employees would not panic and so that we could do the contact tracing in an orderly manner," Duque said.

He said he explained the procedures to Rep. Arthur Pingoy, chair of the House committee on health, and Rep. Roilo Golez who criticized the DOH for not disclosing that the fatality worked in the House.

The health secretary said based on experience, "some (known contacts of a confirmed case) would refuse to make a

disclosure, or they would hide and avoid interviews."

"I told them they were not put under any unnecessary risk," Duque said, adding that DOH personnel were doing their job of investigating the transmission chain to contain further infection in the House of Representatives.

Of the 3,000 House employees, three have so far tested positive for the virus, including the 49-year-old fatality.

The husband of the deceased House employee has already tested negative for the A(H1N1) virus despite developing fever and cough ahead of his late wife.

While the DOH did not disclose the fatality's identity, Pingoy announced that the woman worked in one of the House offices. The House leadership reacted to this news by suspending work for five

days until Sunday, June 28.

The House leadership also ordered flu shots for its employees. The vaccine for the new A(H1N1) strain, however, is still being developed.

Closure not recommended
Under its Interim Guideline No. 13 on the prevention and control of infection in workplaces, the DOH does not recommend the closure of workplaces as a way to contain the further spread of the virus.

It said that if an employee had been confirmed to have been infected, the employee and his close work contacts should exercise home quarantine until he recovers.

"It's not right to undertake extreme public measures like closing public places like schools and churches since our observation is that these are mostly mild cases," Duque said. ■

Cory back in hospital

by JOANNE RAE RAMIREZ
Philstar.com

BARELY two months after undergoing laparo-scopic surgery to excise a cancerous tumor from her colon, former President Corazon Aquino is back in hospital.

A close family friend who asked not to be named because he was not authorized to speak on Mrs. Aquino's health condition said the former president was hospitalized due to loss of appetite.

He asked for prayers for her swift recovery, as Mrs. Aquino has always attributed her resiliency to the power of prayer.

The former president, 76, was diagnosed with colon cancer in March last year.

After undergoing chemotherapy, she underwent a two-and-a-half-hour long laparoscopic surgery last May performed by a team headed by Paris-trained Dr. Catherine Peh and her mentor, Frenchman Joel Leroy at the Makati Medical Center in Makati City.

"The surgery was a success. They were able to take out the cancer-affected area entirely," Kris Aquino, the former president's youngest daughter, said in a telephone interview after the surgery. Kris Aquino recently said on television that the surgery was followed by radiation ther-



Former President Corazon Aquino

Sen. Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, told *The Star* last May that his mother had at times felt she has led a full life and was "ready to go."

"But she promised all of us she will do everything to get well," Aquino III said.

"She was aware of her options and could have just opted for palliatives for a better quality of life. (But) she is a fighter," added the senator. ■

RP Flu cases climb to 727

MANILA—The Department of Health confirmed 123 more Influenza A(H1N1) cases, bringing the country's total to 727.

The new cases, all mild in nature, involved 120 Filipinos and three foreigners, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III told reporters. He said 21 of the patients had a history of travel to a country affected with the novel virus.

Meanwhile, the health chief reported that 85 more A/H1N1 patients have fully recovered. This new number brought the country's total count of A(H1N1) recoveries to 536, or 74 percent of the total sum of confirmed cases since May 21.

Despite the rise in flu cases, Duque said there is no need to panic.

"Most can fight off this novel virus even without medications or hospitalization. If you have mild flu-

like symptoms but you do not have any pre-existing medical condition then there is no reason to be alarmed. Just stay home and take plenty of fluids, vitamins and bed rest," Duque told the public.

However, he advised "high-risk groups" to take the disease seriously.

"We want to make it clear that high-risk groups, once they have the flu symptoms, should immediately go to their doctor," Duque said, referring to patients with uncontrolled diabetes and asthma, those with chronic liver and kidney disease, those suffering from HIV/AIDs and TB, and pregnant women, the young and the elderly.

"They should not wait for their symptoms to worsen because they are prone to many infections other than the novel virus such as our seasonal flu strains," he added. (Philstar.com)

Countdown to end of Arroyo term set

Militants, religious plan rally

LEFTIST and religious groups have set a Manila-wide protest rally on June 30 to start the countdown to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's last year in office.

The Constitution mandates that Arroyo step down at noon on June 30, 2010, when her successor is sworn into office.

Students are also expected to join the protest, which also calls on the House of Representatives not to pursue resolution 1109, calls on lawmakers to convene into a constituent assembly to amend the Charter, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) secretary general Renato Reyes Jr. said.

The protesters will come from different points and will converge at the Liwasang Bonifacio, he said.

Various groups such as Manila-based schools, religious groups, and civil society groups, confirmed participation for the June 30 rally in a meeting at the St.Scholastica's Archive Museum on Tuesday he said.

"June 30 marks exactly one year from the date Mrs. Arroyo's term expires in 2010. It shall also serve as a countdown to bigger protests towards the July 27 State of the Nation Address," said Reyes. (Inquirer.net)



President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

Ruling party to make rules for choosing bets

by LINA DALANGIN-FERNANDEZ
Inquirer.net

TOP officials of the merged Lakas-Kampi-Christian Muslim Democrats (CMD) will get down to work in drawing up guidelines for choosing national and local candidates when they meet.

The first meeting of the members of the national executive committee was slated Wednesday, June 24 at the Annabel's restaurant in Quezon City.

At the center of the discussion would be the fate of Vice President Noli de Castro, the possible presidential contender being eyed by the administration.

De Castro has yet to decide if he would join the party or remain independent until the May 2010 election.

Ray Roquero, Lakas-Kampi-CMD deputy secretary general, said Lakas-Kampi will also have to decide if De Castro would be required to be a member of the party or can be adopted as guest candidate.

Another contender, Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro, who has announced his plans to seek the presidency, will take his oath in the party after it has officially registered in the Commission on Elections,

Roquero added.

The executive committee will formulate the guidelines for the establishment of the party's local chapters and the selection of their heads. It will also create an arbitration and reconciliation committee that will resolve conflicts in the local level.

The national executive committee is headed by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo as chairperson. Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita is president. The committee has 64 interim officers handpicked by Arroyo. (Inquirer.net)

'One-stop-shop' site for 2010 bets launched

by ALLISON LOPEZ
Inquirer.net

PRESIDENTIAL aspirants with Facebook accounts? Forget it. This "one-stop-shop" website for those aiming to run for President has it all.

Backed by the Commission on Elections, the country's first socio-political networking site was launched in Makati City yesterday and would be aiming to create a more informed Filipino electorate for the 2010 elections.

Politicalarena.com, run by a non-partisan technology provider 88DB.com, is an interactive site which allows users to view the profiles, pictures, videos and stands on issues of about 20 "perceived" presidential candidates, or make their voices heard by joining forums.

It targets more than 20 million Internet users in the country, as well as Filipino voters all

over the world who "bemoan the lack of web presence."

"Things are changing now. It's not just the actual voting and counting. We have to automate everything. We have to modernize everything. The Internet is a very attractive platform due to its expansive space. All the candidates will be in one virtual landscape," said Comelec spokesman James Jimenez.

The site is divided into 11 sections: Home, Candidates, Issues, News, Videos, Photos, Calendar, Announcements, Election 101, Forum and About Us.

Each "perceived" presidential candidate - that is, those who make it to the surveys - will be given a web page with a standard layout to ensure "equal footing." ■

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