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Finally, a nationwide registry to screen and help prevent cancers

By: Ruth L. Navarra

To arm oneself with information is one way to battle cancer. To know how others have dealt with the disease can help patients make wise choices for their cure.

These are some of the reasons a cancer registry can become an important part of a patient's journey.

To address the need for a nationwide registry, Philam Foundation spearheaded the formation of Alliance for the Philippines' Health and Advocacy (Alpha) Project, in partnership with the Philippine College of Physicians and Philippine College of Surgeons.

The Alpha Project supported the Cancer Registry Philippines (Care).

"We wanted to work with these organizations to promote health and wellness," said Philam Foundation president Max Ventura. "We wanted a preventive rather than a curative approach. One of the glaring needs when we were surveying the health sector was the need for a cancer registry.

"Thankfully, we came across Care. They were actually doing it already. We felt that instead of reinventing the wheel, why don't we just collaborate with them?"

Hospital partners

Care designed a software application where patients' information, including the diagnosis and the treatment that they have taken, could be inputted. They currently have 20 hospital partners that, in turn, created a Tumor Registry Office to collect the data.

"Cancer care is a hospital internet software app," said Care cofounder Dr. Beatrice "Trixie" Tiangco. "It serves as a database containing data of cancer patients diagnosed and/or treated in a hospital. There's an optional feature which allows you to make it into an electronic medical record. It is also linked to a central database, which is anonymized."

Cancer is a notifiable disease since Republic Act No. 11215 was signed into law on Feb. 14. It means that upon detection of the cancer, the hospital or the doctor is required to report it to the Department of Health.

Dr. Tiangco emphasized that while Philam Foundation and other supporters are funding the implementation of the project, they do not have access to the data of the patients. All personal information will remain anonymous.

Breast cancer

The app can show, in real time, the most common type of cancer inflicting Filipinos. For example, their current database reveals that breast cancer is the most common at 28.9 percent. It is followed by colorectal cancer at 10.3 percent, and head and neck cancer at 7 percent. The data was collected from 10 hospitals and over 5,700 patients upon the app's implementation last year.

“This is just to show you how prevalent breast cancer is, and this is a phenomenon we don’t understand. I believe this to be true throughout Asia,” said Dr. Tiangco.

This insight can direct health experts to study the genealogy and lifestyle of Filipinos, to find out the reason breast cancer cases are high, and prevent its occurrence in others.

The app can also show doctors the treatments, or lack thereof, received by patients in the form of numbers and graphs. A doctor could see the life expectancy of a cancer patient who did not receive any treatment versus one who did. In turn, this empowers the patient to decide what treatment to go for.

The app can also avoid the duplication of data. If a patient registers in two or more hospitals, the app will red-flag the entries, which will be corrected in the server. There is an administrator who checks on the red flags from time to time, to make sure the integrity of the data collected is intact.

The application is free, but hospitals need to create the Tumor Registry Office on their own. They need to hire their own staff to input the data of patients. Philam Foundation supported Care by funding the training and workshop to implement the application.

Dr. Tiangco hopes that the Philippines will soon have a 100-percent turnout rate like in other countries. After all, Care’s mission is to have every preventable cancer averted, every screenable cancer detected, and every cancer patient counted.