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## Meningitis education is key to better response

By Antonio Delos Reyes  
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A patient rushed to a hospital exhibiting symptoms of meningococcal disease will surely put everyone around—hospital staff, patients and even nearby residents—on high alert. That hospital will surely be quarantined: fumigation shall be ordered in some of the rooms to ensure public safety.

All the people who have come in contact with that patient, including the patient’s household and attending health professionals, will be required to take prophylactic antibiotics.

This wide range of precautionary measures only serves to highlight the dangers of *Neisseria meningitidis*, the same type of bacteria that can cause meningitis – a disease that is fatal in hours and spreads quickly if left unchecked.

Meningitis is an inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord.

Symptoms usually include sudden onset of fever, headache, and stiff neck although there are other symptoms like nausea, vomiting, increased sensitivity to light, and confusion

It’s important to get medical treatment right away because meningococemia can get worse very quickly, even within a few hours from the start of symptoms. It also spreads easily from person to person through respiratory droplets, which is why those who live in close quarters including dorms, prisons, hospice, are most vulnerable.

“Educating the public is one way to prevent the spread of meningococemia and at the same time address any panic that is expected to occur,” stressed Philippine Foundation for Vaccination (PFV) executive director Dr. Lulu Bravo in the celebration of the World Meningitis Day (April 24) as well as the World Immunization Week (April 24 to 30).

Dr. Bravo adds that while they do not want to cause hysteria, the group also doesn’t want Filipinos to be complacent, either. “Over time we’ve seen fewer and fewer people getting infected. As a result people forget to think about meningitis when someone gets really sick so we needed to remind everyone about its potential danger.”

This year’s celebration was led by the PFV together with government organizations, medical societies, non-government organizations and academe in collaboration with the Confederation of Meningitis Organization and Pasay City Health Office.

“This annual campaign encourages individuals, families and communities to learn the signs and symptoms of meningitis, the need to urgently treat the disease, and the fact that prevention is available through vaccination against some forms of meningitis,” reminds PFV president Dr. Shelley Ann dela Vega.