



Frontliners get P14-b in SRA, hazard duty pay

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

THE Department of Health (DOH) said P14.3 billion worth of benefits for health care workers has been disbursed in two tranches as of Sept. 3 this year.

The first tranche worth P6.4 billion, covering Sept. 15 to Dec. 19, 2020, has been disbursed, representing active hazard duty pay for 384,159 health care workers and special risk allowance (SRA) for 306,314 health care workers.

For the same period, a total of 103,096 health care workers received P991 million worth of meal, accommodation, and transportation (MAT) allowances.

On the other hand, the second tranche worth P6.9 billion has also been disbursed for SRAs of 379,117 health care workers for the period covering Dec. 20, 2020 to June 30, 2021. Further, 32,281 healthcare workers were covered

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with life insurance worth P16 million.

The DOH also said P570 million worth of checks have also been released to 24,034 health care workers or their families as COVID-19 sickness and death compensation.

Health care workers from both public and private health facilities catering to COVID-19 patients are beneficiaries of the benefits.

As stated in the guidelines, the DOH through its Centers for Health Development (CHD) entered into a memorandum of understanding with health facilities to legally disburse the benefits of the health care workers.

It said the health facilities are then responsible for disbursing the benefits to their employees and submitting a liquidation report thereafter.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III assured the public that the department will push for additional budget for the same benefits of health care workers next year as the country continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Duque said in a news release on Sunday that the sacrifices of frontline workers were clear.

The DOH has 72 registered hospitals with more than 10,000 medical frontliners all over the country.

"They, like many others, put their lives at-risk every day in order to serve patients from all over the country and from all walks of life," he said.

Also on Sunday, infectious disease expert Dr. Rontgene Solante said the SRA mandated by law for health workers must be distributed on time as more workers on the frontlines are resigning due to the stress and health risks in a pandemic.

Health workers are already overwhelmed, Solante said, with some of them already afflicted with the disease.

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While some medical workers are still committed, Solante urged the government to provide the needed support to health workers amid the rising spike in cases that continue to hit hospitals.

"I see their commitment to their jobs. But we need to give them support, not only emotional support. Give them a risk allowance on time as well as other benefits," he said.

On Sept. 1, a day after the 10-day ultimatum given to the DOH by President Rodrigo Duterte to release SRA and other COVID-19 benefits to health workers, thousands of health workers nationwide staged a "National Day of Protest" and demanded Duque's ouster.

On Saturday, DOH Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire assured health care workers they are one with them in their fight against COVID-19, and they are doing all they can to help them.