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## The Pediatric Blood Center rises in the midst of crisis

By Ma. Lourdes U. Concepcion, M.D. | Head, PCMC  
Pediatric Blood Center



FILE PHOTO. A volunteer donates blood at the PCMC Pediatric Blood Center.

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has brought unparalleled challenges to the PCMC Pediatric Blood Center (PedBC). The lockdown from 15 March 2020 to 14 April 2020 squeezed the usual sources of blood as schools and government offices remained closed. There was also a prohibition on mass gatherings. The mobile blood donations came to a halt, but the PedBC remained steadfast in its commitment.

The staff thought of alternative ways to mitigate the decreasing inventory even as the PedBC had enough blood until end of April. Administrative policies, structural changes and behavioral modifications were immediately put in place to be able to stockpile blood and at the same time ensure donor and staff safety.

A contest entitled “Dugong Pantawid ng Pag-ibig” was launched to campaign for volunteers among PCMC employees and their families. This became the main source of blood at that time.

The usual demand became low as elective surgeries that would require blood transfusion and prioritizing emergency cases were cancelled. The suspension of the OPD operations also temporarily kept the demand for blood low.

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As an added measure, our regular donors were fetched from their homes and brought to the blood center to donate at the start of the pandemic. Limited public transportation and other lockdown measures dictated this measure. Authorization passes were issued to donors so that they will be able to donate at the PedBC without being questioned at checkpoints.

The donation area was moved to the well ventilated space between the main laboratory and blood bank, which allowed physical distancing among staff and donors.

The walk-in donors were screened in the triage area at the entrance of the hospital. This involved an initial screening by medical technologists who would allow only eligible donors to enter the donation area.

A makeshift plastic barrier was installed between the physician screener and the donor. Single-use disposable bedsheets were provided to every donor, and the beds were sprayed with disinfectant after every use. Hand sanitizers were placed at strategic stations.

When quarantine restrictions were relaxed, blood drives were resumed but with strict protective measures.

The social media campaigns for volunteer blood donors were launched. An AVP showing that donating blood during a pandemic is still safe was presented on Facebook and Youtube. Consultations with media experts highlighted the need to fine-tune the way social media can be used for the purpose.

Stringent donor assessment was heightened so as to weed out paid blood donors.

Donors were required to make an appointment first with the blood bank. This served as a pre-screening step to reduce donor exposure and save trips to the blood center.

The demand for blood was met by our blood bank. The National Blood Services Network also provided a safety net for the different blood service facilities with the efficient exchange of blood units should the need arises.

# Medicines that help fight COVID-19 Infection

By Karl Joy C. Otiang, RPh

Our country has been battling the corona virus since early last year and a lot of Filipinos are already inflicted with different severity of the illness. The need for medicines that can help alleviate the symptoms or even fight the virus itself is one of the priorities of our country.

The PCMC Pharmacy Division has secured medicines that can help prevent the employees from getting infected and help patients suffering from COVID-19 fight the virus. Through the government's Bayanihan Fund, multivitamins and ascorbic acid tablets were procured for PCMC employees to help boost their immune system.

To date no drug has been issued a Certificate of Product Registration for the treatment of COVID-19. However, utilization programs established by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of different countries, including the Philippines have allowed clinicians to gain access to investigational drugs. This is through the issuance of Emergency Use Authorization (EUA).

The FDA issued Advisory No. 2021-0759 clarifying the approval and use of remdesivir, an antiviral agent and is currently being used for the treatment of COVID-19 in the country, under EUA. It is an investigational drug used only for patients who are 12 years of age and older who weigh at least 40 kg, with critical and severe COVID-19 and require hospitalization. In our institution, it is being used for pediatric patients with COVID-19 weighing less than 40 kg or children younger than 12 years who weigh at least 3.5 kg.

To procure drugs under EUA such as remdesivir, the FDA grants a Compassionate Special Permit (CSP) for medical specialists and institutions that have requested use of the said drug. CSP is a special permit given to physicians or hospitals to use investigational drugs which are not yet registered in our country for the treatment of serious cases of diseases.

The PCMC was able to secure the special permit last March 2021 allowing the Pharmacy to procure remdesivir for our patients. The permit is only valid for 1 year and the pharmacy, is required to submit a Clinical Report to the FDA showing the results of drug usage to each patient.

Indeed, certain medicines are of great help during this pandemic but with the increasing number of infected population, the best way is to wear our mask and face shield properly, observe physical distancing and frequent hand washing to avoid contracting the virus and mitigate the spread of infection.

# The wonders of pooled RT-PCR Testing

By Farrah Kristine F. Santiago, M.D., FPSP



FILE PHOTO. A medical technologist seals the specimen before sending it to the laboratory for testing.

While basking under the golden Boracay sunset, Jen held on to her son, as her husband sat beside her. At that moment, it was quite comforting that in the midst of a pandemic, Jen felt a renewed sense of hope that things can be brought back to “normal” with the simple pleasures of a worry-free vacation on the beach. Jen’s family had to be tested for SARS-CoV2 infection before this Boracay trip, and she was able to afford RT-PCR testing at PCMC for only 750 pesos each. Yes, 750 pesos!

For the first few months of 2021, the Department of Tourism, in its efforts to slowly revive the local tourism industry, partnered with the PCMC COVID-19 Testing Laboratory to offer discounted and affordable RT-PCR rates to local/domestic tourists. In a few months of this partnership, more than 14,000 local tourists were tested, and PCMC was at the heart of it all.

## How is the COVID Lab able to test this many?

Thanks to the concept of pooled RT-PCR testing, more people can be tested with the maximum amount of savings. Pooled RT PCR testing is only one application of group testing. Group testing is a well-developed field in mathematics that allows the identification of carriers in a population with the number of tests that are smaller than the population.

This practice of pooling of samples dates back to 1943 when Robert Dorfman suggested the introduction of pooling of serum samples for syphilis in World War 2 recruits. Since then, pooling has been applied to numerous tests such as for HIV, chlamydia, malaria, influenza etc.

This involves the creation of pools by mixing of samples and performing the test on the “pool” as a single sample. If a pool tests negative, the results of those patients can be released as negative, which ultimately allows mass testing at a faster rate, and saves on tests within a certain range of positivity (which is currently referred to as percent positivity).

With these concepts in mind, in August of 2020 the COVID-19 Testing laboratory embarked on a research to test the applicability of pooled RT-PCR testing for COVID-19. It aimed to increase testing capacity, reduce turnaround time (and release negative results faster), and to facilitate the calibrated exit of the country from community quarantines back to its normal economic and social activity.

The research was a success, and stemming from this, the COVID-19 testing laboratory has been very active in training other RT-PCR laboratories all over the Philippines, as it is designated by the DOH to be the partner facility of the Philippine Society of Pathologists responsible for training other labs who would like to apply pooled RT-PCR testing as well. Currently, the COVID-19 Testing Laboratory of PCMC has trained over 60 RT-PCR laboratories all over the Philippines on pooled RT-PCR testing.

To date, pooled testing has been applied in numerous populations like the PCMC employees, bank employees, government agencies and private corporations. It may also be used to aid local government units in deciding stricter and more granular lockdowns in times when surges and clustering of infections arise.

# PCMC officials inaugurate Doctors' Clinics extension

By Maria Rosario S. Cruz, M.D. | Head, Doctors' Clinics



The management, doctors and employees of PCMC inaugurated the extension of the Doctors' Clinics last June 14, 2021.

The new private clinics are part of a large-scale expansion project spearheaded by the Executive Director, Dr. Julius A. Lecciones for the upgrade and rehabilitation of PCMC's facilities.

Construction activities, which were overseen by Dr. Vince R. Gomez, were undertaken in two phases.

The first phase was started on May 23, 2016 in the area on the hospital's 2nd floor previously occupied by the Division of Pathology. With the support and cooperation of the clinic holders, this area underwent a total transformation. Today, it stands as a facility at par with the best in Metro Manila.

The construction of Phase 1 completed 16 clinic rooms, and features a spacious and well-designed waiting area. Comfortable sofas and the provision of entertainment options including videos and a mini library, make for a patient and parent/guardian-friendly space. The rest rooms and handwashing station are likewise patient-friendly, with provisions that consider the needs of newborn infants, children and adolescents, both abled and less abled.

The blessing of Phase 1 was held on April 24, 2017 as part of PCMC's anniversary activities. Phase 1 became fully operational by September 2017, soon after a soft opening.

Despite the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, construction of the extension of the doctors' clinics, under Phase 2, was carried on last June 29, 2020 with completion attained in May 2021. This phase houses 12 rooms to accommodate the remaining subspecialty clinics on the ground floor with the addition of new subspecialty clinics for pediatric orthopedic surgery, urology, and hematology-oncology.

On June 14, 2021, we celebrated the successful completion of PCMC's upgraded doctors' clinics by holding the blessing of the Phase 2 doctors' clinics. The event began with the invocation led by Dr. Jose A. Robles who represented the clinic holders. Dr. Sonia B. Gonzalez then delivered her welcome address. After the slide presentation on the doctors' clinics, Dr. Lecciones conveyed his gratitude to those who contributed to the realization of the project. The ribbon-cutting ceremony was led by Drs. Gomez and Gonzalez followed by the blessing officiated by Rev. Fr. Placido de Jose, MI. It was a well-attended event, with every room being represented by at least one clinic holder, and the event being shared via zoom.

We remain hopeful that amidst the COVID-19 health crisis besieging our health care industry, the facility will continue to serve as a relevant venue for the more than 130 pediatric specialist and subspecialist clinic holders, as they provide the best care to their patients who come from all over the country.



Fr. Placido de Jose, MI blessed new rooms at the Doctors' Clinics.

# Dr. Julius A. Lecciones: A pillar to the development of PCMC

By Ira Karen U. Apanay | Public Relations Officer III

*Brain Building perspective*



*Cancer Building perspective*



*Multi-level Steel Parking perspective*



For more than thirty years, Dr. Julius A. Lecciones served the Philippine Children’s Medical Center (PCMC) and its community with love and utmost dedication.

He joined the PCMC in December 1990 and became the 5th Executive Director in 2006. As the second longest serving executive director of the medical center, his stewardship and commitment to the community made the hospital the leader to children’s health care in the country.

“When I was appointed as Executive Director in 2006, I thought that six years would be enough. I asked myself, what can I do for six years that may have an impact to the organization and to the people, to the patients and to everyone in the hospital?” said Dr. Lecciones.

One of the challenges he faced during his term was the battle for the ownership of the land where PCMC is situated. He was thankful for the support of the employees, patients, and other stakeholders until PCMC finally claimed its land title.

After Dr. Lecciones managed to claim the land title of PCMC, he start envisioning the modernization of the hospital and was able to secure funds to expand the hospital. As of this writing, constructions of the eight-storey building, Brain Center, Cancer and Hematology Center, Rehabilitation Center and multilevel steel parking are ongoing. These projects will





*The perspective of eight-storey building.*



*The ongoing construction of eight-storey building for charity patients and OPD.*

expand the capacity of the hospital from 200 to 500 beds and would improve the delivery of services of the medical center.

Moreover, it was during the term of Dr. Lecciones when the PCMC gained its ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 14001:2015 Certification and start its Performance Government System journey, which aims to translate organizational goals into breakthrough results.

He improved the welfare of the employees by giving additional benefits, enrich their capabilities by investing on necessary trainings needed such as the Nurse Residency Program, Biotherapy and Chemotherapy Provider Course for Nurses, and Patient Navigation Program Provider Course for Nurses.

He also strengthened the medical assistance fund for the service patients, and programs such as free chemotherapy drugs for cancer patients and the My Child Matters Program.

And while the whole world fights against the COVID-19 pandemic, he wants PCMC to be part of the national government's efforts and established the COVID-19 Testing Laboratory with the assistance of his large network in the government and private companies.

Few months before he retired from government service, Dr. Lecciones contracted the COVID-19 Disease and was admitted in the Intensive Care Unit for 16 days.

"It was the greatest test on me. It was really hard, but God is so good and I miraculously survived. Thank you to those who prayed for my fast recovery," Dr. Lecciones gratefully said.

Dr. Lecciones have dedicated more than 30 years of his life, 16 long years of it as the Executive Director, serving the PCMC. Like a father's role in a child's life, he is a pillar to the development of the institution and the well being of the employees.

Through the leadership of Dr. Lecciones, the PCMC has experienced a rebirth and will continue to soar high in serving the Filipino child.



*PCMC Covid-19 Testing Laboratory*



# 22 Employees honored for their high-impact contributions at the height of the pandemic

By Marjorie Grace M. Apigo, M.D. | Chair, PRAISE Committee

The Director's Office, together with the PRAISE Committee, has honored selected employees for their high-impact contributions, in their respective areas of assignment, which intensified PCMC's response in crisis communication, recovery strategy and execution during the pandemic. During these unprecedented times, these PCMC employees have truly proven themselves, some even beyond measure, which they are responsive, innovative and committed in providing the best service for the benefit of the children. The virtual awarding was held last June 28, 2021 via Zoom.

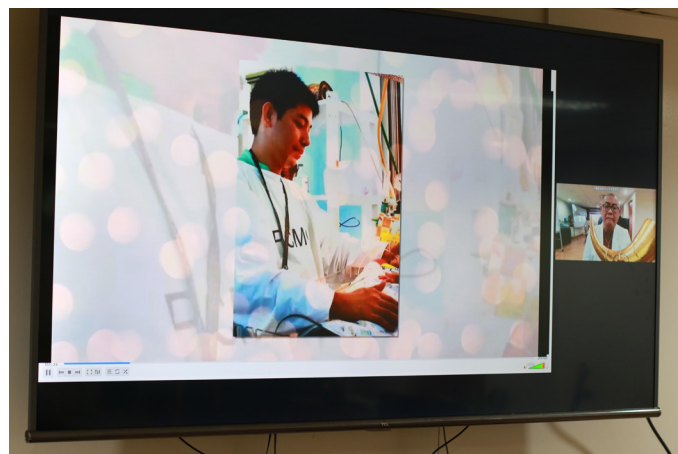
## Director's Commendation Awards

Yearly, PCMC Executive Director, Dr. Julius A. Lecciones recognizes individuals who demonstrated outstanding leadership and meritorious contributions over and above their usual responsibilities. For this year, Director Lecciones focused the spotlight on people who not only displayed significant service marked with professionalism, citizen-focused, malasakit, and creativity, but also performed impeccable service bringing pride, inspiration and accomplishment to the institution.

The awardees recognized for their exemplary contributions were the following:

1. **RAEZELLE NADINE T. CIRO, MD**  
2020 Chief Resident
2. **SOCORRO MARIE V. BUENSALIDO, MD**  
2020 Chief Resident
3. **KATRINA GRACE L. OBRIQUE, MD**  
2021 Chief Resident
4. **MARIZ TONI L. MANALO, MD**  
2021 Chief Resident
5. **RANDY P. URTULA, MD**  
Medical Specialist IV, Head of the Medical Internal Systems Specialties Division
6. **JESUS NAZARENO J. VELASCO, MD**  
Medical Specialist III
7. **MARIA ANNA P. BAÑEZ, MD**  
Medical Specialist III
8. **FATIMA I. GIMENEZ, MD**  
Medical Specialist III
9. **RAYMUNDO W. LO, MD**  
Medical Consultant
10. **GRIG D. MISIONA, MD, DPSP**  
Medical Specialist III
11. **MICHAEL M. RESURRECCION, MD**  
Medical Consultant
12. **MARJORIE GRACE M. APIGO, MD**  
Medical Specialist II
13. **RONNEL P. DIMAALA, LPT**  
Human Resource Management Officer III
14. **EMMA A. MARIANO, CPA**  
Department Manager, Administrative Services
15. **EDWINA G. TARCA, MHSA**  
Department Manager, Finance Services
16. **JULIE MARIE G. LAFORTEZA**  
Project Development Officer IV
17. **MARIA CRISTINA ESTRELIN C. NATONTON, RN**  
Quality Nurse Supervisor/Nurse V
18. **DIORELLA MAE M. DELGADO, RN**  
Nurse IV
19. **MARK CHRISTIAN B. MALIT, RN**  
Nurse IV
20. **MIKE RYAN V. TOMINEZ, RN**  
Nurse III
21. **RAYMOND R. DOBLE, RN**  
Nurse III

### 3rd Leadership and Excellence Milestone Awards



*Mr. Francis S. Dela Cuesta emerged as the sole awardee for the 3rd Leadership and Excellence Milestone Awards.*

For the last 40 years, PCMC remains loyal to its mission in providing quality care to our children as the premier pediatric healthcare facility in the country. Through the years, the institution has continuously honoured PCMC employees and non-PCMC individuals or organizations who significantly contributed to the health and welfare of the PCMC community and its stakeholders, and who devoted their time and effort in the improvement and advancement in health SERVICE delivery, excellent TRAINING and RESEARCH development and innovations.

The 1st PCMC Leadership and Excellence Milestone Awards, through the initiative of Director Lecciones, was launched in 2010 during the 30th anniversary celebration; the 2nd Milestone Awards was conferred in 2015 during PCMC's 35th anniversary celebration; the 3rd awarding ceremony was supposed to be held during the 40th anniversary celebration last 2020, but was moved to this year due to the pandemic.

A total of 6 nominees, under three (3) different categories, were received by the PRAISE Committee and underwent the two-step screening process. Mr. Francis S. Dela Cuesta, RN, who was nominated under the category of Excellence in Government Service, emerged as the sole awardee for the 3rd Leadership and Excellence Milestone Awards. Mr. Francis S. Dela Cuesta transcends excellence in government service through his wholehearted dedication and involvement in implementing innovative and significant public service programs. He greatly contributed to the Nursing Residency Program, the Nursology Initiative, Dengue Program, Vaccination Programs and networking with different institutions. Mr. Dela Cuesta was also instrumental in the establishment of the PCMC COVID-19 Testing Laboratory, by collaborating with different NGOs without cost to the government. Likewise, he efficiently secured the laboratory's license to operate.

His earnest and active engagement in various programs and advocacies has undoubtedly enhanced the essential services being rendered by PCMC especially during this time of pandemic. His integrity, competence, dedication and sound judgment in the course of his service in PCMC is undoubtedly commendable.

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