

The Role of the Doctor Today

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The Philippine Medical Association, which has now a membership of over 60, 000 doctors from government and private sectors and 8 specialty societies together with 118 component societies, is holding its annual convention at Shangri La Edsa Hotel in Metro Manila from May 19 to 22 and has for its theme "Manggagamot Mamamayan at Pamahalaan Nagkakaisa sa Kalusugan." Joining the meeting is the Medical Association of South East Nations.

A random interview among members of the Philippine Medical Association reveals that there are many physicians who are more than willing to actively participate in helping government agencies find solutions to the tremendous health problems confronting our nation, such as the proliferation of fake drugs and sky-high cost of medicines including generics, which serve only as tip of the iceberg. This reaction of doctors is commendable.

It must be however emphasized that future conventions and discussions should not only be concerned with the technical aspect of the medical profession but should also pay close attention to the social and moral implications of the amazing scientific and technological advances we are now experiencing in the field of medicine. We as physicians of today are aware that most of us will within our own lifetime use drugs and apparatus and techniques that will make our present practice seem almost medieval. The pressing problems of today's physicians are therefore no longer merely technological but are also political, social, and moral.

What is the role of the Filipino doctor today?

Unless we ask this question sincerely and attempt to answer it honestly, we may scandalize ourselves and the world, as perhaps may have already been done in the matter of heart and other vital organ transplants as well as euthanasia among others.

What are the principles on which decisions to experiment with the quality of human life should rest? Arnold Toynbee asks " What is the true end of Man? Is it to populate the earth with the maximum number of human beings...or is it to enable human beings to lead the best kind of life that spiritual limitations of human nature will allow." Trying to find answers to that question will shape the direction and future of the medical profession as guardians of the gift of life. Medicine touches the lives of us all. It is the very rare person who does not need medical care sometime in his life. Yet it is precisely here that we face the greatest problem for by far the greatest number of people still does not receive adequate medical care. The health of the poor in this country is an on-going national disaster and rising costs will make it worse rather than better.

The poor get sicker and the sick get poorer. Only the rich seems to be able to afford the luxury of being healthy and the imposing medical centers in Metro Manila and other large cities in the Philippines boast of the latest in medical equipment and expertise stand in witness to the power of money. But as far as the poor are concerned, these modern medical centers might as well be located on the top of Mount Everest. These however would not stand in such glaring contrast to the desolation of the poor if we spread around our country more comprehensive and more effective community health centers and hospitals.

Government and non-government organizations such as the Department of Health under Dr, Francisco Duque III and the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes as well as a few other agencies and organizations are trying hard to upgrade health care for our indigents. However their efforts alone will not be sufficient to achieve these goals without the active help and cooperation of physicians and members of the allied health professions. As doctors, all doctors have a moral obligation by virtue of their profession to do what they can to bring good health to all people, ignoring no segment because of poverty, rare or creed. Public health, national health must be the concern of all doctors in the Philippine Medical Association led by its president Dr. Rey Melchor Santos deserves congratulations for this very pressing moral obligation by virtue of their profession to do what they can to bring good health to all people, ignoring no segment because of poverty, rare or creed. Public health, national health must be the concern of all doctors.