

**SPEECH OF SECRETARY FRANCISCO T. DUQUE III, MO, MSc FOR  
the HEALTHY MIND SUMMIT  
April 21, 2008  
SMX CONVENTION HALL**

**The State of Mental Health in the Philippines**

**GREETINGS**

To the distinguished officers and members of Philippine Psychiatric Association, my colleagues at the Department of Health, the faculty of the summit, delegates and participants of Healthy Mind Summit, friends from Astra-Zeneca, Ladies and Gentlemen;

It gives me great pleasure to join you today on the historic event of the Healthy Mind Summit — the gathering of the Who's Who in the field of Mental Health and key stakeholders in the field of mental health in the Philippines.

Allow me first to congratulate the proponents of this undertaking, for having organized this event and for their collective vision to promote and advance mental health in the Philippines.

In the country and all over the world, millions of people are affected by some form of mental illness. These illnesses affect individuals, they cause suffering to families and they impair the functioning of societies.

Yet mental illnesses or mental health in general is a field of health care that is often neglected. Far too many people do not get the support and care that they need and are often left alone to suffer in silence.

But I am sure that all of us will agree that mental health is the foundation of any just and compassionate society, where no one is forgotten... and where government and health professionals look after the whole spectrum of care from the physical aspect to the mental and spiritual well-being of all individuals.

Indeed, no less than the great statesman, Benjamin Disraeli, noted a century ago, and I paraphrase, that "the (mental) health of the people is really the foundation upon which all their happiness and all their powers as a state depends."

But mental health to me is more than the absence of a mental disorder. Mental health is the ability to think and learn, and the ability to understand and live with one's own emotions and the reactions of others. It is a state of balance within a person, and between a person and his environment. It is what we all need in these trying times of oil & food crisis amid a gathering storm brought about by climate change as well as the volatility of global economy.

However, it pains me to discuss that although many aspects of physical health have improved in the Western Pacific Region, mental health appears to worsen over the last 50 years. The burden of mental and neurological disorders in communities has grown and the imperative to build a strong and effective health system that can respond to the mental health needs of communities remains a daunting challenge.

**Epidemiology of Mental Disorders**

Worldwide, mental and behavioral disorders represented 11% of the total disease burden in 1990 based on disability-adjusted life years (DALYs). This is predicted to increase to 15% by 2020. Depression, in particular is expected to come next to ischemic heart disease by 2020 as the largest contributor of the global disease burden. Five of the ten leading causes of disability are also mental disorders (depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, alcohol use and obsessive compulsive disorders).

The social and economic costs of mental disorders are unacceptably high. Direct costs include costs of health and social services, but there are also other costs, including loss of employment and productivity, the impact on families, and even premature death.

**Emphasizing Mental Health**

But over and beyond mental illnesses, which constitutes 1% for moderate and severe cases and 4-5% for all cases (WHO statistics), we need to focus on the greater majority: You and I - who are mentally stable.

In the country, the overall picture of mental health among Filipinos was shown by a 2006 survey by the National Epidemiology Center of the DOH. This survey included government employees from the 20 national agencies in Metro Manila. The prevalence rate generated from the survey was much higher than those that were previously reported at 17%. 32% of all respondents were found to have a mental health problem at least once in their lifetime. The three most prevalent diagnoses were: specific phobias (15%), alcohol abuse (10%) and depression (6%).

### **Solutions to the Problem: the Department of Health's Standpoint**

Against this backdrop, the Department of Health is doing its very best to address mental health problems as embodied in the National Objectives for Health 2005 - 2010. The goals of the mental health program of DOH is to promote mental health in the general population, to reduce the risks and prevalence of mental disorders, and improve the quality of life of those who are affected. These are lofty goals but crafted in realistic proportions.

In the just recently completed assessment of mental health system using WHO-AIMS (WHO-Assessment Instrument for Mental Health System) it shows that five percent (about Php 484million) of health care expenditures by the DOH are directed towards mental health. Of all the expenditures on mental health, 95% are spent on the operations of mental health facilities.

The Philippine Health Insurance Corporation also now covers mental illness although limited only to patients with severe mental disorders confined for short duration. Likewise, mental health and psychosocial services are included in the outpatient package of Philhealth for our new heroes - the Overseas Filipino Workers.

The Department of Health has already institutionalized the National Mental Health Program through organization of functional management structures that group mental health stakeholders into different committees. They are composed of mental health advocates from central and regional units of the Department of Health, the Director of the National Center for Mental Health, mental health experts from the medical centers, academe, consumer groups and professional organizations as well as representatives from other government agencies. I am very proud to note that most of the members of these committees are present today.

Presently, we are able to provide institutionalized care for mental health patients nationwide. The National Center for Mental Health in NCR currently serves as the main referral unit for mental illnesses in the country with about 4,200 beds. We also have Acute Psychiatric Units in seven DOH-retained hospitals in NCR and psychiatric in-patient regional facilities in 10 of the 17 regions. These DOH facilities are complemented by other government facilities with mental health units which are able to provide a wide range of services including acute to long-term in-patient care, crisis stabilization care, and specialized care for children, adolescents and the elderly.

However, there are no district in-patient facilities in the country and there are also few community mental health services available for our patients. And this is where we need to do more so that we can make mental health services more accessible to patients at the community level.

### **The Department of Health's Commitment**

It is apparent that the elements necessary for pursuing an effective mental health program in the Philippines are in place.

We have academic institutions and training centers, which have good programs to educate and train our mental health professionals and we have broadened the scope of the national mental health program to address a wider array of mental health conditions.

In some ways these changes have advanced the understanding of mental health disorders

so that other agencies have initiated mental health programs relevant to their special needs. The challenge is motivating our professionals -psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses included - to stay in the country and sustain their involvement, especially in our communities, because the country is continuing to lose this valuable and crucial resource to overseas employment.

It is also important to improve our capacity to undertake quantitative and qualitative research and evaluation relevant to service standards and improvement, and to mental health promotion. Improvements in mental health depend, to a large extent, on a culture of research and evaluation. The need to gather and use evidence in order to improve the quality of care for mental health patients cannot be overemphasized.

The NCDPC has currently earmarked Php 5 million to finance a research on the prevalence of mental disorders. We strongly believe that reliable information about mental health and disorders can be a powerful tool that needs support. Indicators of the social determinants of mental health, quality of life and disability, as well as measures of illness, will have to be developed.

To do this, we have to facilitate more interaction among universities, researchers, mental health service providers and communities with the goal of clarifying mental health determinants and outcomes.

### **The Challenge—**

What is our collective response to this challenge? In the face of limited resources, we must collaborate and complement each other's strengths to draw a stronger national framework for mental health. I urge you to look at the possibility of strengthening the National Mental Health Policy through legislation of a Mental Health Act. The road toward achieving healthy minds for all Filipinos may be difficult but I believe that a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.

Together, we must make a stronger commitment to address mental health with the same vigor and urgency that we are doing with other diseases. The toll on human potential and dignity caused by mental illnesses is appalling and we all know that this is unnecessary.

And so, I urge the PPA in collaboration with DOH and major stakeholders like WAPR-Phil and PMHA to take the lead — organize and support a Task Force on Mental Health Legislation to get this proposed Mental Health Act signed into law no later than 2010.

Let this summit today be the start of a more united and a more aggressive stance to promote the best level of mental health for Filipinos. Healthy minds are a prime investment for a healthy, progressive and productive nation. And as a nation committed to protect the health and dignity for our people, it is our task as stewards of the health system, as mental health professionals and as members of the media and civil society to promote a positive and supportive environment for mental health, especially for sufferers by making sure that they receive the care, treatment and acceptance that they need.

So to end, allow me to challenge everyone gathered here today to care for our countrymen's mental, as well as emotional, social, physical and even spiritual health. Together, let us have a powerful sense of purpose to promote healthy minds for a healthy nation. I thank you for the work that you have begun today and commit to you that the Department of Health will dedicate more of its efforts and energy in the advancement of mental health now and for years to come.

Thank you and Mabuhay kayong lahat!