

PRIMARY PREVENTION THROUGH “PROJECT HEALS”

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The Philippine National Anti-Drug Program of Action defines primary prevention as attempts to discourage the initiation of drug use, especially by children and adolescents. It tries to keep them from “falling into the drug river.” These measures and some respective activities are public awareness (advertisements and public fora), public education (in-depth media coverage and parent mobilization), attitude and behavior change/reinforcement (peer counseling and resistance skills counseling), and social/public action (neighborhood improvement and police patrol/ protection).

I would like to add to the above list a most significant activity which I believe should be at core of it all, and that is health care. This is what primary prevention against drug and substance abuse is all about- to maximize human knowledge, skills and caring to make sure that our body, mind and spirit are well-cared for. Once we begin with this, the

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journey towards a healthy and drug-free society becomes effectively clear.

I am a Medical Technologist, a health care professional placed by destiny in an educational environment called Trinity University of Asia (TUA), a sister institution of Trinity Colleges around the world, whose educational philosophy is to develop “persons for others.” It was easy for TUA to seek membership in the Philippine Council of NGOs Against Drug and Substance Abuse or PHILCADSA because we have the same goal of producing young, healthy people who would be our country’s future parents and leaders. The University membership in PHILCADSA is then anchored on its work to educate young people on the importance of health and their duty to take care of the health of others. Very significantly, this means to help ensure that all the families and communities put in their care are aware of the evils of drug abuse and they are empowered to destroy it.

Let me share with you “Project HEALS”, which stands for Health Education and Life Services and whose service goal is Health in the Hands of the People (Self-Reliance) by the Year 2020. This is the volunteer arm of the TUA’s College of Medical Technology. Students volunteer in programs over and above their curricular requirements.

These are medical missions such as medical consultations (deworming, mass-feeding, etc.), establishment of facilities like herbal plant dispensing units, book and toy library, first aid pharmacy, and health literacy including information campaign against drug and substance abuse among parents, youth, children, and village leaders.

The wonderful thing about PROJECT HEALS is the involvement of students finishing a difficult course filled with heavy academic requirements, but their hearts are inflamed to go extra mile. Because their academic-related services take them to urban poor communities where the sword of drug and substance abuse hover above children and youth and even adults, they would fight it by organizing themselves as a volunteer arm for various medical missions. This means putting more hours, maximizing use of supplies and equipment, and giving up socialization time with peers to help ensure that drug and substance abuse does not get to penetrate their communities!

UNDERSTANDING THE PROJECT HEALS AS VOLUNTEER

ARM FOR A HOLISTIC HEALTH CARE:

Definition of Health: *state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. (WHO, 1947)*

Definition of Primary Prevention/Primary Health Care: *providing specific protection against disease to prevent its occurrence. Primary preventive efforts spare the client the cost, the discomfort, and the threat to*
Preventive measures consist of counseling, education and adoption of specific health practices and related activities or changes in life style.

We base and plan our actions thru the acronym: C H E E S E

Where:

C- Christian/spiritual nurturance

H- health (physical)

E- education (literacy program)

E- entrepreneurship

S- socio-cultural

E- environmental

Motto: *Developing Excellent Services Through Small Things- the services rendered by the volunteers of Project HEALS are in a small scale but are scientifically accepted processes that leaves an impact and inculcates right values and attitudes for a clean and healthy living.*

Goal: *Community Self-Reliance: the ability to stand on their own, self-sufficiency*

Health in the Hands of the People (Self-Reliance) by the Year 2020

Objectives: *To provide essential health care based on scientifically sound and socially acceptable methods and technology made universally accessible to individuals, families, and communities through their full participation, at a cost they can afford at any given stage of development.*

Clients: *Urban-poor Residents of Metro Manila and Nearby Provinces*

Development Approach: *Transformatory/Participatory Approach-*

- the process of empowering/transforming the poor and the oppressed sectors of society so that they can pursue a more just and humane society
- assumes that poverty is not God-given, rather it is rooted in the historical past and is maintained by the oppressive structures in society
- believes that poverty is caused by prevalence of exploitation, oppression, domination and other unjust structures

The Project HEALS volunteers organize the community following the Community Organizing Participatory Action Research (COPAR). COPAR is a social development approach that aims to transform the apathetic, individualistic, and voiceless poor into dynamic, participatory and politically responsive community. It is a process by which community identifies its needs and objectives, develops confidence to

take action in respect to them and in doing so, extends and develops cooperative and collaborative attitudes and practices in the community (Ross, 1967). COPAR is a continuous and sustained process of educating the people to understand and develop their critical awareness of their existing conditions, working with the people collectively and efficiently on their immediate and long-term problems, and readiness to respond and take action on their immediate needs toward solving their long-term problems (CO: A Manual of Experience)

COPAR is an important tool for community development and people empowerment as this helps the community workers (in this case the Project HEALS volunteers) to generate community participation in development activities. COPAR prepares people/clients to eventually take over the management of a development programs in the future. COPAR maximizes community participation and involvement: community resources are mobilized for community services.

The Project HEALS Accomplishments in its Six Year COPAR

Implementation

Regular Programs (Curriculum Based)

- 1. Weekly Family Visits**
- 2. “Operasyon Bantay Puso or “Bantay BP” (Blood Pressure)**
- 3. Health Information Campaigns (mini-classes) on:**
 - Personal Comfort and Hygiene Measures**
 - Intervention of Common Diseases in the Community**
 - Drugs and Substance Abuse**
 - Proper Nutrition and Food Handling**
 - Common Intestinal Parasites**
 - Over-the-Counter, Traditional and Alternative Medicines**
- 4. Seminar-workshop on First Aid and Safety**
- 5. Seminar workshop on Disaster Management**
- 6. Seminar-workshop on Spiritual Care**
- 7. Seminar on Family Planning and Responsible Parenthood**
- 8. Participation in the Department of Health (DOH) Annual Expanded Immunization Program**

Special Programs (Volunteer)

- 1. “Oplan Timbang” and Mass Feeding, (Quarterly)**
- 2. “Bantay Bulate”**
- 3. “Oplan Linis Katawan”**
- 4. “Adopt A Child for a Day”**
- 5. “Oplan Timbang” and Mass Feeding**
- 6. “Tulong Kabuhayan”**
- 7. “Pamaskong Handog Para Sa Mga Batang Lansangan”**
- 8. “Oplan Linis Galis”**
- 9. “Operasyon Linis Bahay at Kanal**
- 10. “Waste Segregation”**
- 11. “Operasyon Linis Kapaligiran”**
- 12. “Operasyon Tepok Lamok”**
- 13. “Adopt A Child For A Day ”**
- 14. “Alay Tanim”**
- 15. “Palaro Para Sa Mga Batang Lansangan”**

Special Projects (Volunteer)

a) Donations

- 1. Monobloc Chairs and Tables, Barangay Kalusugan Health Station**

2. Seminar Tent, Barangay Roxas

3. Waste Segregation Bins, Barangay Obrero

b) Campus-based Projects

1. “Paunang Lunas Botika ng Barangay”

2. CMT Main Herbal Plant Dispensing Unit (HPDU-Main)

3. “Laboratoryo ng Barangay”

4. “Lingkod Bayan”

c) Community-based Projects

1.) “Barangay Book Library”

2.) “Barangay Toy Library”

3.) “Barangay Walk-In Blood Donors”

4.) Herbal Plants Dispensing Units

5.) “Paunang Lunas Botika ng Barangay”

6.) Health Literacy , Silong Tanglaw

7.) Health Information Campaign thru Arts (Mural Painting)

Linkage Sponsored/ Co-sponsored Programs

1. Blood Typing, Professional Regulation Commission

2. Blood Typing, TC High School Integrators Club

3. **ABS-CBN “Bantay Kalikasan” Tree Planting, La Mesa Dam**
4. **Medical Mission, PAMET and PAMET USA**
5. **Blood Typing, TC Elementary PTA**
6. **Grace Giving**
7. **Medical Mission, Rotary Club, Brgy. Pag-asa, Quezon City**

Project HEALS simply keeps its student volunteers and community clients (families: parents, children, the youth, community leaders, health workers) observe wellness and busy themselves with worthwhile social activities or services to prevent them from engaging drug and substance abuse.

We do develop excellent people out of our great simple but great services!!!

At the heart of this voluntary health care mission is making the communities see for themselves and be convinced that there are other persons out there, especially young ones, who lovingly bother about them. That they have a role in today’s society, that facing present-day social challenges and realities is possible, that they are important, that there are others who care about them and their health so they can be

prepared to shape their own future. And most of all, that it is within their power to get away from drug and substance abuse. When they see that young students, out of the goodness and selflessness of their hearts care for them and their health, why should they not empower themselves as well, for their own sake, and that of their families and communities. This way, there will be no need for secondary or tertiary prevention. Because we begin rightfully and well, with self-help and the help of “persons for others,” I believe there cannot be anything else but a happy ending.