

Medical Missions

--Bringing costly surgical intervention within the Reach of Indigent Patients

Medical care is costly, surgical intervention even more so. It can sometimes be prohibitive even for the moneyed, so one can imagine how heavy a burden it can be for the poor.

Fortunately for Filipinos, there are government health care facilities like the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) that are dedicated to making medical service accessible to indigent patients and non-government organizations like the Rotary Club of Makati (RCM) with help programs for the needy. On their own, PGH and RCM have achieved much, but their partnership has proved beneficial beyond words.

PGH and the Club entered into a partnership in RY 1989-1990 during the presidency of Rey Adriano on the initiative of Boy Hilvano, then chief of Gastrointestinal Surgery at the PGH. It was, in the words of Boy, "a collaborative effort of the Department of Surgery, UP-PGH, and the Rotary Club of Makati, with full support from staff from the Department of Anesthesiology, Operating Room nurses and the Post Anesthesia Care Unit" and the objective was "to lessen the backlog of patients waiting in the Out Patient Clinics of the Department of Surgery to be accommodated into the elective schedule of operations in the hospital," while satisfying the Club's objective of extending a helping hand to those in need.

On its maiden year, only two missions were conducted, but by the third year, the project had grown to a monthly activity, scheduled every third Saturday of the month. Surgeries target patients suffering from such surgical problems as hernias in adults and children, hemorrhoids, cleft lips and palates, meningocoeles, breast cancer, gallstones, and large soft-tissue tumors. Per project design, the surgeons, both consultants and residents, as well as the anesthesiologists and nurses, volunteer their services.

In the early years, the Club provided a minimal honorarium to the OR nurses who came just for the mission, while a corporate sponsor, Chowking, through the initiative of its founder and president, Robert Kuan, donated the snacks and lunch for the volunteers. The arrangement held for 10 ten years, from the first mission in 1989 until December 1999. In January 2000, however, after Robert sold Chowking, the Club took over the responsibility of providing the snacks and lunch for the volunteers. Sometime later, after it was found out that many of the patients could not afford to buy the required medical supplies and had no money even for transportation home, some Rotarians, headed by Bud Melvin, put up a fund to which such emergency expenses were charged. It was a move that was met with much appreciation by the patients.

The Club is grateful to the PGH for this long-term partnership and, in particular, to Boy Hilvano (who went on to become chair of the PGH Department of Surgery and current chair of the UP Manila Information Technology Council) for initiating it. Now on its 23rd year, the Medical Missions project has served the surgical requirements of ___ patients, not just from Metro Manila and neighboring provinces but from across the country. Its benefits to the men, women and children whose lives have been prolonged and enhanced after undergoing surgery are beyond measure.

