Philippine President Benigno Simeon S. Aquino III expressed his enthusiasm with the spirit of innovation shown by institutions and individuals engaged in research for health.

The President’s address at the opening ceremonies of the Global Forum on Research and Innovation for Health 2015 was delivered by Philippine Department of Science and Technology Secretary Mario G. Montejo, who formally opened the four-day conference. Aquino noted that this pro-active stance and constant vigilance are what is needed in ensuring the well-being of peoples all over the world, most especially in developing countries.

Aquino’s message recounted the numerous instances in the recent past in which the Philippines could have faced serious health crises if not for the watchfulness and quick response of the nation’s health sector in cooperation with international partners. These incidents included the threat of MERS, SARS, and Ebola virus. He also cited in his remarks the advances made in research and development in healthcare, ranging from the integration of herbal medicines in the country’s drug formulary to highly sophisticated developments such as the RxBox that enables primary care health workers in remote locations in the Philippines to transmit patient data to clinical specialists in Manila for expert advice.

“Indeed, whether in the sector of governance or health: innovation cannot arise from complacency; it is imperative that we search for better ways to serve our fellowmen,” Aquino stated in his address delivered by Secretary Montejo.

Secretary Montejo remarked in his welcome remarks at the opening ceremonies that Forum 2015 would be a valuable opportunity to share best practices and forge partnerships on people-centered initiatives that would lead to better outcomes and equity in health. “Together, we can find appropriate solutions from all corners of the world,” he added.

In his message at the opening ceremonies, Hon. Mmboneni Muofhe, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Science and Technology of South Africa expressed his optimism on the success and value of the Forum. As South Africa hosted the previous Research Forum, Muofhe symbolically turned over the “drum” of advocacy to the Philippines.

This was seconded by Undersecretary Vicente Belizario, Jr. who delivered a message on behalf of Secretary Janet L. Garin MD, as he expressed that this Forum will set a precedent for other research fora to follow suit in pushing for real-world solutions to the most pressing problems in public health.

Forum 2015 is the biggest such event ever, - with over 4,000 registered delegates, over 200 speakers and presentors, and 50 countries represented. Professor Ijsselmuidden expressed confidence that this COHRED organized global gathering would be “the Go-to Forum” for research in health. The Philippine hosts of the Forum are the Department of Science and Technology, along with the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development and the Department of Health.
Among the key elements in achieving sustainable economic development is investment in healthcare, and investment in research and innovation for health. Thus, a shared global health agenda will offer huge opportunities for developing countries like the Philippines to participate in and help find solutions to common global problems in the area of health. It is, then, vital for every country to strengthen its national health research and innovation capacity, and optimize research and innovation systems.

These points were stressed by Dr. Gerald T. Keusch, director of the Collaborative Research Core of the Boston University National Emerging Infectious Diseases Laboratories, and chairman of the COHRED Board of Directors. Dr. Keusch expects the Global Forum on Research and Innovation for Health 2015 to be “an exceptional meeting, with many new scientific relationships developing as a result, both North-South and South-South, in support of their common goals to improve health, equity and development in low and middle income countries through the creation of strong national research and innovation systems.”

Dr. Keusch will moderate the plenary session “Translating research into innovation” at Meeting Rooms 2 & 3 on Wednesday Aug. 26, the third day of the Forum. Speakers of the session include Shelly Batra, co-founder and president of the Operation ASHA; Anurag Mairal, consulting associate professor of medicine and director of Global Exchange Program of Stanford University; Glaudina Loots, director for health innovation of the Department of Science and Technology in South Africa; Robert Zeigler, director general of the International Rice Research Institute; and Yogesh Rajkotia, founder and chief executive officer of Thinkwell.

Dr. Keusch’s career is focused on clinical medicine, teaching, and research. Board certified in Internal Medicine and Infectious Diseases, he is a professor of medicine at Tufts University School of Medicine and senior attending physician and chief of the Geographic Medicine and Infectious Diseases Division at the New England Medical Center in Boston.

His research interests range from the molecular pathogenesis of tropical infectious diseases to field research in nutrition, immunology, host susceptibility, and the treatment of tropical infectious diseases and HIV/AIDS. The plenary session Dr. Keusch shall be moderating promises to offer valuable insights into the utilization of research in health in actual practice, a pressing issue raised by COHRED Executive Director Professor Carel Ijsselmuiden in his speech at the opening ceremonies of the Forum.

Dr. Gerald T. Keusch
New relationships to create strong national research and innovation systems

Formally established as a legal entity in 2013 by virtue of the passage of Republic Act No. 10532, the Philippine National Health Research System (PNHRS) is now exploring practicable approaches towards expanding the scope of research for health in the Philippines, as it is noted to be concentrated in the National Capital Region.

At the PNHRS assembly conducted on the first day of Forum 2015, Dr. Juan Ma. Pablo R. Nañagas, Ms. Merlita M. Opeña, and Dr. Jesus Sarol, Jr. pointed out the need to strengthen the System so it can function as a healthy system in the consortium and inter-consortia levels. The System was created to protect and promote the right to health of the people, instill health consciousness among them, and improve the quality of life of every Filipino through health research and development. As such, its presence should be felt in all parts of the country with much emphasis on collaboration and cooperation among all stakeholders.

The discussion, moderated by Dr. Patricia Lontoc, Dr. Ofelia Saniel, and Dr. Alice Joan Ferrer, raised the observation that the funding which is made available by the provisions of the enabling act, is ironically underutilized by the many areas throughout the country which could surely benefit from research in health relevant to their needs. It was pointed out that the seeming reluctance to request for research funding could be borne from a “poverty-consciousness” that has been characteristic of Filipino researchers who tend to presume that funds are not available, even if they actually are.

The PNHRS encourages people from different regions to ask for funds, propose research projects and build infrastructure. Exploring mechanisms to facilitate these processes, the focus group discussions on monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, resulted in recommendations that included the creation of an online platform for submission of reports, organizing online access of data and centralized data-banking in institutions, standardization of the definitions and terms such as “Researcher,” and appointing point persons or liaison officers in each institution to expedite communication.

The Philippine National Health Research System (PNHRS) has a 5-year plan with a vision of achieving a dynamic and responsive health research community working for the attainment of national and global health goals. The plan was crafted similar to a balanced scorecard, and contains 5 areas of focus: financial, learning & growth, process excellence, stakeholders, and governance. Divided into these 5 areas of focus are 8 strategic objectives that also contain their own individual performance measures.
WELCOME RECEPTION: PHILIPPINE NIGHT

Forum 2015 kicks off with a warm welcome reception and presentation of the best of Filipino entertainment. The gala event was held to offer everyone an opportunity to get acquainted with each other in preparation for the full-packed conference over the next three days.

DOST Secretary Mario G. Montejo enjoys the entertainment numbers with delegates and guests at Forum 2015.

Junior New System together with Nocturnal Dance Company performed exciting and breathtaking routines at the welcome reception.

El Gamma Penumbra showed their championship form as winners of the recent Asia’s Got Talent contest as they performed a heartfelt and action-driven act during the Welcome Reception's Philippine Night.

Nicole Laurel Asensio gave an astounding performance at Forum 2015.

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