The Global Forum on Research and Innovation for Health 2015 came to a close with a shared commitment to expanding the scope of research for health in all parts of the world, and exploring greater partnerships and multi-disciplinary cooperation. Although the Council on Health Research and Development (COHRED) has organized research fora for the past twenty-five years, Forum 2015 was the first of its kind, being a gathering of researchers, professionals, and experts from various disciplines with the unified aim of using research to improve health and innovation.

The well-attended four-day Forum concluded with a plenary session at which top representatives of pertinent organizations delivered their declarations and respective calls to action addressed to the assembly. Secretary Mario Montejo of the Philippine Department of Science and Technology, one of the local host agencies of the forum, appealed to the assembly to work towards creating an enabling environment for research and innovation for health in low and middle-income countries to develop solutions to pressing health problems, and to make science, technology, and innovation a part of people’s everyday lives, especially among marginalized communities.

Secretary Montejo also raised a call for countries to up the ante by increasing resource allocation for research in health so they would be able to strengthen their own abilities to undertake, manage, transfer, and translate research output into actual policies, health actions, products, and services.

Speaking on behalf of Secretary Janet L. Garin of the Department of Health which is the other Philippine government ministry that hosted the forum, Dr Lilibeth David remarked on the need to “build on each other’s strengths to overcome each other’s weaknesses.” Remarking on the need to foster and reinforce partnerships, Dr David added, “Remember the conversations you have had in the past few days. Review the business cards in your pockets. They may just be the solutions to the next problems you need to solve.”

She noted how the Department of Health has, in the past, explored means of making health research possible within the agency by allocating 2 percent of every program’s budget to research initiatives. Now that the institutions are in place for more structured research systems through cooperation with other agencies, she expressed her wish to ensure the robustness of these initiatives, particularly in the face of the challenges posed by aging, climate change, proliferation of lifestyle-related diseases, and rapid urbanization that are anticipated in the coming years.

Continued on page 3
A group of graduate students from the Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU) in the Philippines revealed during a workshop that they extensively used tweets to gain important information for disaster studies they conducted following a 7.8 Magnitude earthquake that pummelled Nepal on April 25, 2015.

In the workshop entitled “Training of Disaster Situation Report from Voices of Survivors,” student Jhoanna Isla from the ADMU School of Science and Engineering said the group started gathering tweets right after the temblor which caused an avalanche in the famed Mt. Everest, and that resulted in an estimated 8,712 fatalities, according to the United Nations Resident Coordinators Office in Nepal.

Using the method of extraction, the students collected 3,972,517 tweets mostly coming from Nepal, the United States, and countries in Southeast Asia. These were used to acquire information on the needs of people in affected areas, the locations of these affected areas, reports on infrastructure damage, requests for rescue or relief, and prediction of crowd movement. According to Isla, such information was particularly useful for locating areas where help was needed, and in predicting crowd movement.

The group also utilized text data mining to produce a list of topics as well as the sentiments of the people, as reflected in the tweets. According to team member John Noel Victorino, a lot of positive tweets came from Nepal itself. However, he added that information on safety sourced from text mining was not enough.

Based on the overall information gained, the team found it necessary to train on the proper use of social media or create a system that would allow direct reporting of needs to facilitate decision making. It was also found that tweet topics should be defined further, and that there is a need for language translation due to the observation that the Nepal earthquake and any other disaster of such magnitude attracts worldwide attention, and caters to a varied audience.

The other members of the ADMU team were student John Clifford Rosales and Marlene de Leon, chair of the Department of Information Systems and Computer Science.

### Tweets may be sweet for disaster studies

**Filipino Grad Students Utilize Tweets for Research**

A study reveals that the most common social media used by health professionals are Facebook, MySpace, Google Plus, and Twitter. Dr. Madamba reveals how Twitter can actually facilitate research projects in many ways. Twitter is an online social networking service that enables users to send and read short 140-character messages called “tweets.”

“You can tweet about each new publication,” Madamba said. “Use hashtags to make your materials more visible.” Hashtag or the pound symbol (#) is used in Twitter to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet.

Moreover, Twitter can help researchers reach out to external audiences; and it can likewise be used as a painless metric, such as a Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus research launched in December 2014. The post was able to sample a total of 300 random tweets containing the hashtags: “#type1diabetes,” “#t1d”, or “#type1”. Through Twitter, the research group was able to learn about the conversations regarding type 1 diabetes that can help in understanding the kind of information relevant to people affected by the disease.
Call to Action for Greater Cooperation

Dr. Gerald Keusch, who serves as Chairman of the Board of COHRED, remarked on the effective cooperation he witnessed among the Philippine Government ministries involved in the Forum. Dr. Keusch recounted how he marveled at the high level of engagement he witnessed among the Filipinos attending the Forum’s sessions, citing their frankness and outspokenness in expressing their needs and professing their commitments.

He further shared his positive impression of the young people who he observed at the meeting. “If you are an indication of where the Philippines is, you will succeed,” he added.

Former Philippine Department of Agriculture Secretary Dr. William Dar called for increased investment in health and in research for health by all governments, especially in developing countries. He stressed on the need to establish and nurture more investment in health from the private sector, and to explore workable partnerships with government. Citing his own experience in the developmental sector and in the International Rice Research Institute, Dar pointed out that the great amount of interdisciplinary synergy present in the country ought to be tapped to benefit health.

COHRED Executive Director Professor Carel Ijsselmuiden took the opportunity to express the gratitude of his organization to all the participants, hosts and organizers, and workers who made Forum 2015 an outstanding success. He presented Philippine Council on Health Research and Development Executive Director Dr. Jaime Montoya with a plaque of appreciation to commemorate the landmark conference. Professor Ijsselmuiden also introduced and presented a pre-recorded video greeting from fabled Filipino boxer and first and only eight-division world champion Manny Pacquiao. Apart from extending his best wishes to attendees at the Global Forum, Pacquiao expressed his enthusiasm and optimism on witnessing the outcome of research for health greatly benefiting Filipinos, including Filipino athletes, in the near future.

Closing the event was Department of Science and Technology Undersecretary for Research and Development Amelia Guevara, who thanked the speakers and resource persons for the valuable input they shared with participants in the Forum which truly possessed a global character, having been participated in by 72 countries. She stressed on the vital role all sectors ranging from the private sector, government, civil society, and the international scientific community play in bringing health to the people, pointing out the relevance of such synergy to the conference themes of social accountability, increasing investments, health capacity building, and intensifying research in health.

Undersecretary Guevara reiterated the commitment of her agency to continue its cooperation with COHRED, noting how the Forum facilitated new partnerships and strengthened old ones. Finally, she urged all present to share what they have gained from the conference with others when they return to their respective agencies and countries of origin.
Forum 2015 highlights the value of health systems research in policy making

Health systems research is an integral part in developing responsive health policies according to Vergil de Claro, officer-in-charge of the Corporate Planning Department of the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth). He elaborated on these principles during the Forum 2015’s session on Increasing Public Investments for Health.

De Claro noted that the establishment of Health System Research Management allowed PhilHealth to validate some of the reforms that they are doing in support of universal health care in the country. This system seeks to aid the Department of Health to support evidenced-based policy and decision making, and increase capacity for research.

He pointed out that a number of reforms and strategic interventions are based on the researches that have been generated by the HSRM. One example is the study conducted by Philippine Institute of Development Studies for PhilHealth which allowed the institution to review and improve the PhilHealth CARES (Customer Assistance Relations and Empowerment Staff) program—a program that taps registered nurses to provide information to members at point of service.

He also mentioned the No Balance Billing system which provides that no other fees will be charged to indigent patients above and beyond the packaged rates, and shifting to case-based payment which reimburses healthcare institutions with a fixed rate for each treated case or disease. These were among the more significant reforms made towards upscaling services based on health researches.

Seeing the importance of research in policy making as shown by the HSRM, De Claro revealed that in 2013, PhilHealth was able to institutionalize its own research which allowed them to generate and allocate funds for ongoing research activities for healthcare.

In the same session, Dr. Lilibeth David, director of Health Policy and Development and Planning Bureau of the Department of Health, pointed out the importance of making research outputs understandable for policy makers.

“They may have only time to read a one-page briefer summarizing the key results of the research and a three to five page policy notes based on the research,” Dr. David elaborated. As part of capacity building, the research reference hub, which is an organized structure of health research experts tasked to manage the HSRM, conducted a communication workshop on how to help the researchers make their research outputs understandable for policy makers.

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Dr. David also mentioned the efforts to disseminate the results of health research and the advocacy for health research through various means, including participating in local and international fora presenting the results of research, conducting an annual national research forum where HSRM research projects are presented, and publishing policy notes and completed health research papers, among others.

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Health researchers and professionals can also use Twitter as a basis in program development, particularly in determining the information needs of patients so that appropriate social media programs can be developed to address those needs.

“Twitter can also be used for health promotion, particularly in discussing sensitive health topics, such as sexually transmitted diseases (STD),” Madamba said. Citing actual Twitter examples, Madamba disclosed that STD talks over Twitter are quite serious and informative, and evidently not a joking matter. Further, Twitter can be used for professional purposes, and to organize support groups, she continued.

Meanwhile, health professionals in the academe have found that social media enriches health professions education, as vouched by Dr. Iris Thiele Isip Tan of the University of the Philippines College of Medicine. Citing her own experience as a professor, Dr. Tan maintains that social media as used in the academe can make learning visible, create a personal learning network, and address concerns.

Until a few years ago, the learning sequence was predictable: listen to lecture, research and prepare assignment, pass your assignment. Today, the learning sequence has evolved into: watch video, read resources, upload assignments. In between all this, students and professors can blog, tweet, post, and report.

“There are likewise new competencies for learning,” Dr. Isip said, citing “enquiry, production, participation, and digital literacy.”

For example, the professor gives this assignment on personal health records: What features of the personal health records are most critical or most useful to users? In order to come up with the answer, students have to make an enquiry by choosing an online personal health record service or app. Then students proceed to production by creating a scoring system, participation by signing up to the sites, and then digital literacy by writing a blog post on their impressions and findings.