

The situation: Poor access to medicines in the Philippines

- * Access to quality essential medicines is part of every Filipino's right to health.
- * High prices and unavailability are the hallmarks of medicines supply in the Philippines. A survey by the World Health Organization and Health Action International in 2006 showed that medicine prices were between 3.4 and 184 times higher than the international reference index and that the availability of essential medicines was only 11 per cent in the public sector.
- * If you are a government employee earning a daily wage of P254.10 in 2005, you would need several days' worth of wages to purchase standard treatments when purchased in private pharmacies:
 - * for depression: one month fluoxetine, 32.8 days' wages for originator brands
 - * for ulcer: one month ranitidine, 8.5 days' wages for originator brand and 3.1 days' wages for cheapest generic product
 - * for hypertension: one month captopril, 6.1 days' wages for originator brand and 2.4 days' wages for generic product.
- * Purchases of these standard regimens in public facilities were only marginally lower.
- * Other factors include financing, selection mechanisms, rational use and efficiency in procurement and supply systems. Medicines are mostly borne out-of-pocket by patients. Philhealth estimates that out-of-pocket payment among members is around 45% while for those who are not covered; around 100% is paid out of pocket.
- * Government financing does not guarantee provision of medicines for the poor and vulnerable. The government procurement

for medicines as reported by the Pharmaceutical Management Unit in 2006 is only around Php 740,000,000 pesos in the face of a US\$1.3B industry. Budgetary allocations for medicines at the level of the local government units are equally unsatisfactory. In a study done in 2006, LGUs allocate only .08% to 10% of their health budget for medicines.

The call: Transparency and accountability in the healthcare workplace

- * The root causes of poor access to medicines are complex. The wide information asymmetries between the patient and the physician, the often poorly defined and documented processes that comprise the system, the limited institutional checks and the size of the market and economic interests, all contribute to the potential vulnerability to corruption in the pharmaceutical system.
- * In the Philippines this is compounded by the lack of tools, systems and structures for information disclosure and the multilevel political decision making brought about by the decentralization of health care.
- * Transparency is defined as the visibility and accessibility of information. In the context of the healthcare workplace, transparency means that information regarding the selection, regulation, procurement, sale, distribution and use of medicines is readily available. This readily available information will in turn help influence policymaking towards improving access to medicines.
- * Accountability is being able to answer for one's own actions. The healthcare

workplace is comprised of several stakeholders, each of which have roles to play and whose acts therefore must be accountable to each other and to the general public, who is the ultimate beneficiary of the healthcare workplace.

- * The challenges in transparency and accountability around medicines registration, selection, procurement and use of medicines are enormous, but can be capped into two major forms: 1) non accessibility of data to policy and decision makers and consumers and 2) lack of tools and structures for adequate reporting, disclosure and feedback.

MeTA Philippines: Who we are

- * The Medicines Transparency Alliance (MeTA) brings together at both the international and national levels a diverse group of people with interests in the pharmaceutical sector.
- * MeTA Philippines is a network composed of government agencies, pharmaceutical industries, global and national civil society organizations and international partners. MeTA Philippines is working towards improving the lives of Filipinos by helping them get access to the medicines they need.
- * MeTA Philippines focuses on strengthening the capacity to collect, analyze, disseminate and use data on medicine quality, availability, pricing and promotion. By doing so, the country driven approach of multi-stakeholder participation will help improve transparency and accountability around the way of essential medicines and health commodities in developing countries are selected, regulated, procured, distributed, supplied and then sold to and used by patients.

MeTA Philippines: Our principles

- * Governments are responsible for providing access to health care, including access to essential medicines.
- * Stronger and more transparency systems and improved supply chain management will increase access.
- * Increasing equitable access to medicines improves health and enables other human development objectives to be achieved.
- * Improved information about medicines can inform public debate, and provide a basis for better policy.
- * A multi-stakeholder approach that involves all sectors - private, public and civil society - will lead to greater accountability.

MeTA Philippines: Our operational strategies

The MeTA Council Philippines was formally inducted into office by then Sec. Francisco T. Duque of the Department of Health last 11 December 2007. Elected as officers were: Dr. Alberto Romualdez, Jr. as Chairman, Mr. Roberto Pagdanganan as Vice-Chairman and Dr. Kenneth Hartigan-Go as the Secretary. The Council is composed of representatives from the government, the academe, professional associations, pharmaceutical industry and non-government organizations.

The Council serves as the policy-making body of MeTA in the Philippines and shall develop and monitor the national workplan for MeTA implementation. It regularly convenes to assess progress and plan future responses (e.g. in relation to new work on transparency, work to promote the results widely, and work to respond to weaknesses in the procurement and supply system identified in the MeTA Report or related publications).

The MeTA Forum

The MeTA Forum in the Philippines is composed of a larger multi-stakeholder group that would involve a larger participation from the industry, civil society

and the government. The Council reports the progress of work to the Forum every end of the year. Stakeholders who are part of the Forum may also be engaged in particular Committee work and other specific programs and projects.

Financial and technical support

MeTA Philippines provides financial and technical support for making information about medicines publicly available. It will strengthen national capacity – including the capacity of stakeholder groups to engage in a process to collect, analyse, disclose and use data on the quality and registration status of medicines, their availability, price and the promotion policies and practices. Analysis and public disclosure of how the medicine supply chain works, and issues affecting the affordability of medicines, equitable access and the rational use of medicines will help to see how to improve policy, practice and health outcomes for people.

Multi-stakeholder approach

There is a progressive disclosure of a standard set of core data covering the quality, availability, price and promotion of medicines. Civil society, business and other stakeholders work together to generate, disclose, debate and use this data to help address problems in the pharmaceutical market. This multi-stakeholder approach aims to shift some decision-making power to consumers and put greater competitive pressure on suppliers – thereby improving the functioning of the pharmaceutical market – and to promote better governance and more appropriate resource allocation by public purchasers. Ultimately, that means better health for people.

Medicines

Essential health commodities, such as drugs, vaccines, contraceptives, diagnostics and laboratory supplies

Transparency

Improving information access, scrutiny and use, to support the development of viable, efficient medicines markets and supply systems that benefit all developing country consumers

Alliance

Stakeholders from public, private and non-profit sectors working together to effect significant positive change