eISSN 2984-8644

GUEST EDITORIAL

Philippine Journal of
Allergy, Asthma and Immunology

PSAAI: Always Keeping our Patients our Priority

Julia C. De Leon, MD

"While there are significant differences in the delivery of health care throughout the world, there is one constant, the patient."[1]

These words written more than ten years ago, still ring true today. One of the core values of PSAAI is to advocate for its patients. Through the establishment of patient advocacy groups, we have been helping patients and their families, and their physicians. Through collaborative efforts, advocacy groups and Society members can continuously guarantee the best quality of care for these patients while helping further the cause of science to improve their management.

When the Philippine Society of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology was founded in 1972, the main goal was to promote the recognition of allergology and immunology as a distinct subspecialty. Three major institutions with its mentors and trainees, namely the University of the Philippines – Philippine General Hospital, the University of Santo Tomas and the Fe del Mundo Medical Center endeavored to produce subspecialists who would practice in their respective provinces or communities. All that hard work has paid off. PSAAI has not only gained recognition by colleagues from the medical field but continues to enthusiastically contribute to the dynamic landscape of the medical community both locally and globally.

PSAAI was also actively involved in the establishment of the APAACI, the Asia Pacific Association of Allergy and Clinical Immunology. This brought allergists and immunologists from different ASEAN countries together working towards addressing allergic diseases in the region. In the home front, it also reinforced training of its graduates through module-development and inter-hospital case presentations exclusively for its members and fellows-in-training. This was an invigorating avenue for both learning about and managing interesting cases.

Along with its growth in members and recognition, was the need to prioritize and advocate for its patients not only in continuous education but in improvement of quality of care. When the World Allergy Organization celebrated World Allergy Day in July, 2005, PSAAI joined the celebration. A year later, through our Society's lobbying, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo declared July 8 as National Allergy Day.

This proclamation allowed for partnerships between the Society and the Department of Health and other stakeholders, especially patients and their families to help increase public awareness of allergic disease.

Then PSAAI President, Dr. Hiyasmin M. Lim, recalled how former PSAAI president Dr. Manuel F. Ferreria wanted to have allergy patients and their families come together to take part in various learning activities. This included attending lay fora, joining support groups with the goal of understanding and better managing their disease. Thus, in 2006 the Allergy Club was born under the directorship of Dr. Linda Lim-Varona.

Through the years under the guidance of various members, the Allergy Club continues to be a healing support group through the help of PSAAI and other stakeholders. It stays true to its mission of sharing knowledge through the partnerships of physicians, pharmaceutical companies, and patients for the purpose of controlling and managing allergies. Presently under the leadership of Dr. Caroline Aquino-Biolena, the Allergy Club has grown in number. Even during the pandemic, fun activities such as online Zumba and virtual National Allergy Day celebrations via social media platforms have been very successful. This highlights the fact that patients really feel the need to connect with each other and learn from these different activities.

As Immunologists, PSAAI is in the forefront to educate and increase public awareness about primary immunodeficiencies among Filipinos. A significant inroad of advocating for rare conditions such as these is the formation of the Philippine Patient Organization for Primary Immunodeficiencies (PhilPOPI) in 2017 through the initiative of Dr. Fatima Johanna Santos-Ocampo and Dr. Vicky Biñas. The PhilPOPI is a national member organization of the International Patient Organization for Primary Immunodeficiencies (IPOPI) with the PSAAI as its expert advisor.

The mission of this non-profit organization is to promote the welfare and the quality of life of patients with primary immunodeficiencies. They hope to be a proactive, supportive, and nurturing patient organization providing a strong network for Filipino families with patients affected by this condition.

Since their inception, PhilPOPI has tirelessly and actively provided substantial and effective public awareness campaigns through radio interviews, social media posts, patient-doctor meetings and PSAAI-sponsored interesting case presentations.

As for all patient advocacy groups, such as PhilPOPI and the Allergy Club, the end goals have evolved from just educating Filipinos by providing real facts about their health conditions.

Along with educating, our purpose is to strongly advocate and protect the rights of our patients through lobbying for policy formulation, government recognition, and increased affordable medical care and treatment.

We recognize that in order to eliminate obstacles to proper healthcare for our patients, we need secure partnerships between health and patient organizations, government agencies, and supportive communities. This includes continuous dialogue and conversation to gain proper understanding and perspectives about healthcare in an everchanging landscape.

As we look back at the last 50 years, the heart of PSAAI has always been the patient. It always will be.

REFERENCE

1. Lara AA, Salberg L. Patient advocacy: what is its role? Pacing Clin Electrophysiol. 2009;32(Suppl 2):S83-5. PMID: 19602171 DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-8159.2009.02392.x