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SEAMEO TROPED Philippines
*Regional Centre for Public Health, Hospital Administration,
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STATEMENT FROM THE FACULTY

August 4, 2020

Recalibrating the COVID-19 Response Amid the Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine: Collaboration, Consensus and Capacity Building

We, the faculty members of the University of the Philippines College of Public Health (UP CPH), the SEAMEO TROPED Regional Centre for Public Health, are in solidarity with our frontline medical practitioners, a number of them our own students, alumni, and colleagues who have borne the brunt of the rise in COVID-19 cases, in their recent call for a "time-out." Our previous statement (June 24, 2020) emphasized the need to enhance public health, surveillance and response amid this pandemic situation through collaboration, consensus and capacity building. Since the release of the said statement, and amid efforts to strengthen testing, treating, tracing and isolation/quarantine while in the general community quarantine, the reported number of new cases per day has increased from 538 in mid-June, to as high as 5,032 in early August. We view this as an indication of further need to enhance the country's strategies and approaches against COVID-19.

Now that the National Capital Region and nearby provinces have been placed under a modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ), we consider this an opportune time to recalibrate the COVID-19 response in the country. We also support the MECQ as a means to slow the spread of the pandemic and stem the increased demand on our health system. Moving forward, we recognize that the COVID-19 response will require stronger collaboration, consensus and capacity building.

Collaboration is necessary in reviewing and evaluating policies and efforts that may have succeeded or not, and recalibrate these interventions as necessary. Importantly, there is a need to ensure the representation of key sectors that have the necessary expertise required to help address this major public health challenge.

Consensus is necessary in ensuring that reliable data and evidence are processed and analyzed with scientific expert guidance, thereby providing support for policy decisions and coordinated action. This expert guidance is also crucial in developing appropriate and actionable key messages. Communicating these key messages effectively for the benefit of policy makers, practitioners and the general public will hopefully help in building public trust and inspiring unity.

Capacity building is necessary in ensuring that control and prevention efforts against COVID-19 are in place in communities, workplaces, and schools. Empowering local government units in all levels, especially in their frontline roles, will be key to strengthening surveillance and response as part of overall public health efforts. Enhancement of knowledge and skills of frontline public health workers in the communities may be directed towards intensifying contact tracing, isolation/quarantine, as well as managing complex situations such as those of locally stranded individuals, confirming cases through polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) testing, carrying out other equally important public health programs and the roll-out of Universal Health Care, and implementing risk communication strategies, among others.

We in the UP CPH continue to commit to supporting capacity development so that the government, private sector, development partners and other stakeholders will be able to carry out these recommendations and work towards a recalibrated, coordinated, unified and stronger approach against COVID-19.

Kayang-kaya natin ito kung tayo ay sama-sama at tulong-tulong sa paglaban sa pagsubok na ito!