



Dr. Carmencita M. David-Padilla: Safeguarding the health of Filipino children

Most people would give anything to work abroad in search of greener pastures. But not Dr. Carmencita D. Padilla. After receiving genetics specialty training in Australia, she returned and established the country's first-ever Medical Genetics Unit at the University of the Philippines College of Medicine. Despite lack of modern facilities and insufficient funding, she was able to expand the unit's services and later established a cytogenetics laboratory for research and diagnosis.

In 1998, the unit developed into the Institute of Human Genetics and became a significant part of the National Institutes of Health–UP Manila. Under her leadership, the institute has made significant contributions in the development of genetic technology and research in the country. Her most significant accomplishment is the introduction and continued expansion of Newborn Screening in the country. Newborn screening is a public health prevention program for screening, detection and early diagnosis and treatment of newborns for inherited conditions that can lead to mental retardation and death, if not detected and treated on time.

Introduced in the United States in 1961, newborn screening has been integrated in routine newborn care in most (if not all) developed countries. In the Philippines, many have made initial steps but due to disinterest from the health sector and funding sources, past efforts did not bear fruit.

Despite lack of funding, Dr. Padilla enlisted the help of several colleagues to initiate the Philippine Newborn Screening Project at 24 Metro Manila Hospitals in 1996. Through her perseverance, she was able to convince the Department of Health to integrate newborn screening in their service delivery system. Since then, newborn screening has slowly but steadily expanded throughout the country.

However, this was not enough for Dr. Padilla. She was determined to make newborn screening available to every newborn Filipino regardless of socio-economic status. In 2003, she drafted the bill on newborn screening and within one year of intensive lobbying, the Newborn Screening Act of 2004 was signed into law. This paved the way for the creation of a national advisory committee,

standardization of newborn screening fees and the inclusion of newborn screening among the benefits under the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PHIC).

Dr. Padilla's passion for newborn screening has not only saved countless infants from certain death; it has also saved others from lives of inconvenience due to mental retardation.

Her leadership of newborn screening has led to her appointment as Executive Director of the Philippine Genome Center, a research unit of the UP System with programs in health, agriculture, livestock and fisheries, biodiversity, forensics and ethnicity, ethics, legal and social issues) and two core facilities (DNA sequencing core facility and core facility for bioinformatics). She is former Director, Newborn Screening Reference Center; former Chair, UP PGH Department of Pediatrics, and former director, UPM Ugnayan ng Pahinungod.

She is an Academician of the National Academy of Science and Technology and University Scientist 3, UP System. She spent her Pediatric Residency Training at the PGH Department of Pediatrics and her Fellowship in Clinical Genetics at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children, Sydney, Australia. She obtained her MA in Health Policy Studies, College of Public Health, UP Manila in 2005.

She has chalked up more than 27 years of experience as a teacher, clinician, researcher, institution builder, policy setter, and health advocate that are now serving UP Manila in good stead. Part of her vision as chancellor is for UP Manila, as a major partner of the Department of Health, to lead in health policy generation and development through the researches of the College of Public Health, College of Arts and Sciences, and the National Institutes of Health. This is to ensure that the national government's health programs are relevant and responsive to the needs of the majority of Filipinos.

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