



Dr. Benito Arca of CHD-III talks about his experiences in handling rabies victims. Other panelists include (from left to right): Dr. Jess Villaroman of Angeles City, Dr. Mila Mananggit of DA-RFU III, Dr. Susana Sicat, Dr. TJ Javier and Ms. Fe Ocampo of the Provincial Health Office

GOs and NGOs Vow to Unite Against Rabies in Pampanga

“Unity and organized intervention are our best policies against rabies.” This was the common realization among the participants of the Rabies Awareness Forum that was held at the San Agustin Parish Hall on Friday, March 27, 2009. The activity, the first ever public forum on rabies in Pampanga brought together representatives from various groups and agencies involved in the campaign against rabies including the Provincial Health Office of Pampanga, the City of San Fernando Health Office, the City Veterinary Office of Angeles, City Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO) of San Fernando, Pampanga Disaster Response Network, Inc. (PDRN), Health Integrated Development Services (HIDS), Pampanga Pediatric Society, Sindalan Barangay Council, Kapampangan Marangal, Inc., and Couples for Christ.

The forum was initiated by SANGKAP (Santungan ng Kababaihan at Kabataan sa Pampanga) in partnership with the City of San Fernando Pampanga Realtors Board (CSFPRB), Inocencio Magtoto Memorial Foundation, Inc. (IMMFI), San Agustin Parish, and XM Ads and Events in celebration of the Women’s Month and the Rabies Awareness Month. SANGKAP also launched its anti-rabies website (www.rabiespoi.org) during the forum.

According to Dr. Mila Mananggit, DVM of the DA-RFU III (Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Unit-III), Region III has consistently topped the list in animal rabies cases nationwide for the last six years. Pampanga, along with Bulacan and Nueva Ecija, has always been included among the top 10 provinces with high incidence of animal rabies.

The Provincial Health Office, on the other hand, reported that there were 2,033 reported cases of animal bites in the Province of Pampanga in the year 2008 (excluding Angeles City). The incidence rate for the Province last year was 27.52 per 100,000 population. In 2007, there were five reported cases of human deaths due to rabies in Pampanga, with an incidence rate of 0.26 per 1 M population. Dr. Benito Arca, Assistant Director of the Center for Health Development-III (CHD-III) related his experiences with rabies patients when he was the Director of San Lazaro Hospital. He emphasized the need for various sectors of society to work together, hand in hand with the local government officials and government line agencies to help prevent and control rabies which remains a serious public health concern around the world.

Rabies is a disease that is caused by a virus transmitted via bites, scratches or licks on open wounds from infected animals. Once the signs and symptoms of rabies appear, it becomes irreversible and 100% fatal. In the Philippines, unvaccinated dogs and cats are the most

common sources of rabies infection. The Department of Health estimates that 300 to 600 Filipinos die of rabies each year and at least 50% of these are children aged 5 to 14 years.

The Department of Agriculture advises pet owners to be responsible enough to have their dogs and cats vaccinated starting 3 months of age and give them booster shots annually thereafter. The Pampanga Pediatric Society recommends as pro-active measure the inclusion of rabies vaccination as part of the regular regimen for children like what is done for other infectious diseases like measles. The Provincial Health Office reminds the public to seek immediate post-exposure treatment immediately after an incident or exposure to rabies.

There are currently two-government-owned Animal Bite Treatment Centers in Pampanga – the Jose B. Lingad Regional Memorial Hospital in the City of San Fernando and the Diosdado Macapagal Memorial Hospital in Guagua. The Provincial Health Office hopes to put up two more (one in San Luis District Hospital and one at the Macabebe District Hospital), according to guests Dr. TJ Javier, Dr. Susana Sicat and Ms. Fe Ocampo who came to talk about the on-going efforts towards rabies prevention and control in Pampanga.

“There are many initiatives undertaken by various groups to help eradicate rabies in the country,” says Nina Tomen, Program Officer of the Rabies Prevention and Organized Intervention (Rabies POI) of SANGKAP. “However, there is a need for us to consolidate our efforts towards an organized intervention to attack the rabies concern from all fronts – from legislation to enforcement, to massive information dissemination and treatment. Rabies is a highly misunderstood disease and there is a need to inform the public of the serious threat it poses to everyone.” Tomen’s five year-old son, Gian Carlo died of rabies in December of 2008.

SANGKAP vows to advocate for the enactment of anti-rabies ordinances at the provincial and municipal levels and for organized intervention in Pampanga. For starters, the group joined the Coalition Against Rabies Disease (CARD) initiated by the City Government of Angeles through City Veterinarian Jess Villaroman. CARD was organized to make Angeles a dog-friendly city and rabies-free by 2012. The group which counts among its members Rotary Club Angeles North and West, Holy Rosary Parish-Social Action Center, Pampanga Agricultural College, City of San Fernando Pampanga Realtors Board and Ospital ng Angeles is currently helping draft and review the city’s anti-rabies ordinance.



SANGKAP's Ebers in action, shown here with IMMFI staff, lay leaders of San Agustin Parish