

SPEECH FOR SECRETARY FRANCISCO T. DUQUE III, MD, Msc., for the 25TH FOUNDATION ANNIVERSARY AND 24TH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE MOTHER AND CHILD NURSES ASSOCIATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

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Manila Hotel

Theme: MCNAP AT 25, Reaching Beyond Health and Well-Being of Women and Children

Greetings (VIPs)

It is a pleasure to join you this morning as you celebrate 25 years of promoting the health and well-being of Filipino women and children. 25 years is indeed a milestone for the Mother and Child Nurses Association of the Philippines! And I am honored to share with you this wonderful event.

This juncture in your history as an organization can be likened to the productive period in the life of any woman. At 25, a woman holds the fertile promise of giving and nurturing life. She has that power to create...to shape... and to cultivate the lives of her children...and therefore strengthen the magnificent chain of human potential.

Likewise, at 25, your organization holds that much promise. You can definitely reach beyond upholding the rights of our women and children! You can fashion out a future where every mother need not die of childbirth...where every child grows well and safe...and each human life is conferred its rightful worth and dignity.

Being in the frontlines, certainly you are the first to understand the vital contributions of women and children in our society. Healthy, educated, and productive women are essential to a child having the best start and lease in life. Strong and well-nourished children make for a powerful nation and a bright and optimistic future for us all.

This concept is nothing new in the global health agenda. In fact, nations have set on the enormous task of alleviating world poverty and inequity by improving maternal and child health. 2 of the 8 millennium development goals (MDGs) have been especially devoted just so we can reduce maternal and child mortality. Unfortunately, known priorities have not crystallized into visible results and felt actions. In 2004, it was found that we were seriously off-track in meeting targets for the MDGs.

The problem lies not in the lack of interventions. In our country, interventions exist such as antenatal and emergency obstetric care for mothers. We have the National Immunization Program...Araw ng sangkap Pinoy (ASAP)...Food fortification...The Bright Child Program... and Mother and Baby Friendly initiatives to promote exclusive breastfeeding in our clinics and hospitals!

These programs suffer not really from lack of resources but from weak enforcement especially among those who need them the most. Sadly, many of the mothers and children in far-flung and poverty-stricken areas, are not being reached by these essential services.

The saying that you can eat an entire elephant one bite at a time rings true more than ever. Little things can really make a huge difference. We can reverse the tide of maternal and child deaths only if we harness the proven benefits of low-cost interventions which now exist. We can save many lives each year just by improving access to basic health care...promoting and

supporting exclusive breastfeeding...and through early recognition and prompt treatment of childhood illnesses.

Let me dwell a little on the benefits of breastfeeding...because it is in fact the single most important preventive intervention readily available for both the mother and the child. Breastfeeding will protect the child and the mother in the entire life cycle. It can lower child deaths by shielding them from deadly conditions especially in the first five years of life. It can improve maternal survival by sheltering the mother from significant postpartum blood loss and other conditions such as breast, endometrial and ovarian cancer later on.

Clearly, breastfeeding can help us already address 2 of the millenium development goals related to maternal and child health. But did you know that breastfeeding can directly help us achieve all the rest of our goals for global development? That with this simple intervention we can already combat the vicious cycle of poverty and ill health?

That is why as mother and child nurses, you are a very significant link in our chain of delivering quality health services for all. Not only through effectively treating common childhood illnesses can you help prevent child deaths. But through sheer advocacy and education of our mothers and families on these available low-cost interventions, you can help us realize a decent quality of life for every woman and child. You can help build a future where every Filipino reaches his or her fullest potential.

Now, let me leave you with a great principle which I hope you will remember as you make little baby-steps in your practice. This is called the Daffodil Principle.

This principle started with a marvelous story of one woman who changed the world through creating a magnificent garden. Everyday, the woman would go to an obscure mountaintop with the dream of creating a beautiful garden of daffodils. With nothing but her hands and this simple dream, she would plant one bulb at a time...patiently waiting as the flowers grew so slowly and bloomed for only three weeks of each year. For thirty-five years, she learned to love this slow process of planting...relishing each tiny increment in time...and rejoicing in each yearly season of blooming that reminded her of her humble achievement.

Years later, her garden would grow into a glorious and enormous sight!...five-acres of 50,000 daffodils!...drawing awe and inspiration from countless people who were able to see the rows and rows of daffodils.

As you struggle in your work each day, I want you to remember this story. Each day is a chance to break our best personal records and make a difference in someone else's life. We can change the world child by child...one human life at a time.

Thank you very much.

