

SPEECH OF SECRETARY FRANCISCO T. DUQUE For THE HEALTHY LIFESTYLE in HEALTHY SETTINGS SUMMIT

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Greetings (VIPs)

Good morning and thank you everyone for giving me this opportunity to talk to you this morning about something we should all seriously take to heart. I understand that today we are taking a very positive step towards fulfilling our vision of a healthy nation by hosting the very first summit on "*Healthy Lifestyles in Healthy Settings.*"

Today I am asking all Filipinos to enjoy the myriad benefits of leading healthy lives and creating healthy environments for which I am an active advocate. Today, I am also encouraging all of you to do a little bit of what I do everyday. Take the stairs! Jog for at least 30 minutes! Be an avid walker! Don't smoke! Drink alcohol in moderation! Eat a healthy diet! Avoid risky health behaviors!

All of these are known but neglected health nuggets to which I try to adhere and for which I always find time despite a tough schedule. The results were not immediately evident but they were no doubt significant! I was delighted to find out very recently that the results of my health check turned out to be normal. This was after years of being disappointed with lab results that were often off-the-charts --- my blood cholesterol was now at controlled levels, my sugar was at an all-time low, and all other results were optimal. There were also a lot of other payoffs that were beyond measure --- my mind was working at a sharper speed...my endurance was way better...I was mostly in an upbeat mood... and I was surprisingly juggling with a lot of stress like a pro.

Now, it has become my resolve to take these personal health gains to a higher level --- that is to encourage people around me to do the same and achieve better Health for All. Whereas wellness is largely a personal choice, it is also an important national goal and responsibility.

We are now up against a silently building war against lifestyle diseases that kill many of our people. They are every bit our shared business because they afflict us and our loved ones...they steal vitality and productivity...and they jack up costs in our health system. The facts have become more difficult to bear and are causing serious alarm as we increasingly adopt and settle for the Western or modern way of living.

- The incidence of hypertension, CVD, cancers and diabetes is up
- 6 out of 10 of our most potent killers are due to these non-communicable diseases or NCDs topped by cardiovascular diseases.
- By 2030, the country is projected to rank 9th globally with the highest burden of diabetes.
- Our national waistline is also increasing. Obesity may likely take the place of malnutrition as the major nutritional problem in the country similar to the current

experience of more developed countries. 24% or nearly 1 out of 4 Filipinos are now considered overweight and obese.

- Results of the 2003 National Nutrition & Health Survey indicate that we are as much responsible for these deadly statistics. Major risk factors for these diseases are prevalent among our people today namely, smoking, physical inactivity, and unhealthy diet.

I am mentioning all these not to throw a spotlight on future fatal consequences...but for us to step up to the challenge and take charge of our choices and our lives!

We also need to take the war against unhealthy lifestyles to bigger and braver fronts. Health gains and wins have to be made among individuals, homes, families, schools, markets, workplaces, hospitals, cities and communities.

Often, lifestyle is considered as a mere personal issue while forgetting that it is as much heavily determined by social conditions, policy changes, or environmental decisions. For example, while physical activity is the most easily adaptable and economical healthy favor we all can readily do for ourselves, many of us still find reasons for not exercising or taking a simple walk. Why so? Latest studies are pointing out that our health choices have much to do with the chances that are made available in our settings. CDC reports that people are more likely to walk and use bikeways when there is an enjoyable scenery...when there are streetlights and less traffic ...when there are low levels of crime ...and when people perceive the neighborhood as safe, clean, and well-maintained

There is great value in building healthy places. This has long been a cornerstone of our own efforts in the DOH to promote positive health behavior and healthy lifestyles among our people. In 1997, the Philippines became one of the first countries in the Western Pacific Region to develop an integrated health promotion program with the healthy settings approach involving all relevant sectors.

Now we have model cities like Marikina and San Fernando following the Healthy Cities Initiative, which empowers people living in urban settings to cope with modern and complex lifestyle diseases. There are also healthy workplaces that nurture workers by promoting regular exercise...stress management programs...implementing a ban on smoking...and offering preventive health screening which are covered by health insurances. The Department of Health leads in the battlecry for Healthy Lifestyles by holding HATAW fitness sessions twice weekly for our employees and firmly implementing the anti-smoking policy within the DOH to make sure that our workers are breathing cancer-free air.

In like manner, we have Health-promoting schools, which are also an essential component in creating a culture of health among our youth. Schools should be nests of good health by serving heart-healthy lunches and snacks in the cafeteria as well as eliminating vending machines that give children access to junk foods with zero nutritional value.

Let me just emphasize at this point our thrust to start early in building healthy lives by promoting healthy habits among our children. This means targeting interventions early on by following current dietary guidelines like exclusively breastfeeding our infants in order to prevent future obesity. This also calls on parents to be models of an active lifestyle and to engage their kids in sports and other forms of recreational activities. This is a key message I would like to share with you this morning: To create healthy lifestyles, it is vital to start early with our children and continue across all ages well into their adolescent and adult life and later on in their older years.

I was surprised to learn just lately that Americans devote an entire week in April where television is totally off-limits. The National TV Turn-off Week was started in 1995 by the TV-Free Network association in the US and is now being supported by other groups such as the American Medical Association and the American Pediatrics Society. While Americans initially found it an absurd idea, it was an effective move to free up more quality time to exercise, read, spend time with family, and enhance American kids' creativity. Now it is catching fire in other countries like Australia, Canada, Japan, Great Britain and Italy among others.

In the next few months, we shall be similarly intensifying our National Healthy Lifestyles Campaign and "beating the drum" across the nation in calling for an integrated approach in preventing lifestyle diseases and their complications. With 41 other stakeholders coming from various sectors, the DOH as part of The Philippine Coalition for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases will ramp up efforts in our ACTION FOR LIFE advocacy. Currently we are working with Fast Food Centers to make way for healthier food choices for Filipinos. We are also aiming to replicate an unprecedented feat in 2003 when the Philippines led by the DOH had a record-breaking success of gathering at least 48,000 people to participate collectively in a mass aerobic activity.

In closing, we own a tremendous responsibility in deciding our fate against the rising tide of lifestyle diseases. The local governments, national agencies, and communities have big roles in building healthy settings by integrating public policies and environmental decisions in meeting the improving and enhancing public health. Together let us make healthy choices, lead healthy lives and create better chances for our people through shaping healthy settings.

Thank you and good morning.