

**SPEECH FOR SECRETARY FRANCISCO T. DUQUE III, MD, MSc. for THE 60<sup>TH</sup> YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION (PGEA) AND THE 9<sup>TH</sup> YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF NATIONAL CONVENTION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES WORKING COUNCIL (NCGEWC) DURING THE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES' WEEK**

December 8, 2005 (9 AM)  
Heroes Hall, Malacanang Palace

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*Theme: Kawani Kabalikat sa Kinabukasan: Mabilis na Reporma Tungo sa matatag na Republika*

Greetings (VIPs).

Good evening. It is a great honor to join our nation's medical professionals and distinguished experts from other countries as we look together at safety and health issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Whether in or out of the occupational setting, the skin is an important route of exposure to chemicals and other contaminants. Indeed, the skin is man's sacred garment...serving first as our primary defense against potential hazards in the environment...and secondly, a ready visual evidence, providing clues for the keen eye of the clinician on a possible adverse exposure which may have occurred unnoticed in the past.

In developed countries where there is adequate routine occupational surveillance, occupational dermatoses are among the most important causes of disease reported in the workplace. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics, for instance, cites dermatological problems as "the most common non-trauma related illnesses" affecting some 12% of American workers in virtually every known type of occupation or industry.

Yet when considering occupational and environmental healthcare issues, dermatological problems do not come readily to mind. They are just among other work- and environmental-related illnesses, which continue to grow globally into silent epidemics. With thousands of potentially harmful chemicals being introduced in and out of the workplace each year, the threat of rapidly emerging skin diseases will remain and will continue to be serious public health concerns.

Coming together this year in this symposium therefore provides a much-needed opportunity to focus our attention on a critical public health issue that impacts the nation's health. The thrust of the Department has always been to promote and protect the health of whole communities. With current challenges being posed by a modernized and industrialized world, environmental health risks have taken on new forms. Protecting people and ensuring their health and safety have become a more daunting responsibility.

The Department has the mandate to form and implement regulation standards within and outside the workplace setting. But it is with the shared efforts of other health professionals that these standards are translated into best practices... practices which can definitely improve and save lives. "Forging partnerships" in responding to emerging challenges in occupational and environmental medicine is therefore vital.

At this juncture, allow me to personally extend my warm felicitations to our friends and delegates from the Asia-Pacific Region. Indeed, we look forward to a meaningful and revitalizing experience with all of you over the next few days as we exchange knowledge and improve our capacities to respond to the prevailing trends in the field of dermatology.

Thank you and welcome to everyone!