

COMMUNITY HEALTH PROGRAMS

LIFTING THE BURDEN OFF PATIENTS LIVING WITH NCDS

SUBMITTED BY HUMANITY & INCLUSION FORMERLY HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL

ACCORDING TO International Diabetes Federation, the Philippines will be one of 10 countries with the highest number of diabetes cases by 2030. Humanity & Inclusion took on the challenge of closing the gap between the existing national non-communicable diseases (NCD) framework and the needed services for NCD prevention and control in Davao City. Diabetes care was thus improved through a three year pilot diabetes project from 2007 to 2009 - with emphasis on preventive foot care and rehabilitation. Based on this experience, the cardiovascular disease (CVD) project was launched, to promote a multidisciplinary and integrated approach to care for people with CVD risk factors and diabetes.

In a local community in the heart of Davao City, a small daycare center can be found surrounded by houses so close together that the streets become narrow. Inside the facility, four-year-old toddlers sit at their tables - drawing, writing, and occasionally playing around the colorful little room. At one corner sits the sole head teacher of the daycare center, quietly observing and sometimes instructing her pupils. She is Betty Coyoca, a 69-year-old teacher who, despite her age and continuous struggle with diabetes, still manages to carry on her passion as an educator.

Her story is one example of unwavering dedication and hope in the midst of life's challenges and struggles. Her career as a teacher had a rough start: she wasn't able to teach right away because there was no work available, so she had to find other jobs like being a security guard. In her community, she observed that there were a lot of small children and a lack of facilities to prepare them for basic education. She was inspired to create a daycare center, and so began her lifelong passion as a teacher. With minimum resources, she sought out ways to maintain the center by asking for donations. She ran the daycare facility all on her own, until the local government adopted it and kept her on as the head teacher.

When she was 40 years old, she began to experience body weakness and observed that she was constantly urinating, especially at night. There were days when she could not teach at the daycare center because she felt sick and had to stay at home. She consulted a private doctor, and for the first time discovered that she had high blood sugar. The news devastated her and she was worried that the illness would affect her work and her family. Her children were still small and with her average salary, she feared her condition would make it difficult to make ends meet. The medicines that the doctor prescribed were an added burden, as she could not ignore the necessity of purchasing them to alleviate the effects of her diabetes.

Despite of the news of her illness, Betty was determined to continue her work as a teacher and still provide for her family. When she could not purchase her maintenance medications, she would avail of the free services that she could find in her community: visiting Barangay health centers to acquire free medicines and consultations, seeking free services from certain drugstores, and taking advantage of local government services with no charge. But these services were not always available and with her time divided between work and raising her family, she sometimes forgot her medications until she felt sick again. She also struggled with financial constraints with family expenses forcing her to budget her money; she could not always buy her maintenance medications because she had to buy food and other necessities for her children.

In 2011, a health worker in her community informed her about the new cardiovascular disease (CVD) program and how this program would provide free health services specifically for patients with diabetes and hypertension. Betty grabbed the opportunity to take part in the program and quickly discovered the benefits.



Betty Coyoca
at her daycare
center in
Davao City,
Philippines

As a registered patient, she gained access to specific health services geared towards addressing her diabetes like fasting blood sugar (FBS) monitoring, free medicines, and foot risk assessment. Ever since she enrolled in the program, the struggles of having diabetes were more bearable. She is able to monitor her blood glucose levels, which have gradually lowered, and with health education, she is more aware of the benefits of good diet and exercise. When asked why she continues to teach in the daycare center even though she can retire, she responded, "I love to teach, I am inspired to see my students grow up to be successful individuals and as long as I can wake up every day and go to work, I will continue to teach even though I'm old and have diabetes."

