

# HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS TACKLING NCDs IN THE PHILIPPINES

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A SEASONED NURSE and a dedicated public servant are just some of the qualities that can best describe Ms. Ceasara (Sara) Morales, 58 years old, a public health nurse from Davao City. She has been practicing her profession for more than 30 years and has experience both in the clinical and public health settings. After working in the hospital for 10 years, she is currently a full time public health nurse working in the community. Presently, Ms. Sara is the NCD (Non-communicable Disease) coordinator of one of the districts in Davao City.

Ms. Sara is a NCD nurse coordinator and completed trainings related to her specific job description, such as the Diabetes Educators training program back in 2012. The City Health Office of Davao City implemented a program called the CVD (Cardiovascular Disease) program and after being trained and capacitated, she was able to apply her training and knowledge to the program. According to her there were a lot of changes and improvements observed after the implementation of the CVD program in her community especially in the patients themselves. Prior to this program there were no specific programs addressing Diabetes and Hypertension. Patients would not seek medical attention in the health stations because there were no services offered like free medicines and screenings and patients would only decide to consult medical attention when their condition was complicated. Now that a program is being rendered to the community to address the CVD problem, the community responded positively and the patients began to be more empowered and informed about the importance of seeking not just treatment but health education regarding cardiovascular disease.

One of the biggest challenges that Ms. Sara encounters when caring for patients with an NCD in the community is changing the health seeking attitudes of the patients. She states that no matter how often and how effective your health education is being given to patients, if they are reluctant and unwilling to cooperate to the health program, it is very difficult to convince them to change their behaviors in dealing with their condition. Most of the patients belong to low and middle income families, so they are more focused in other social matters like employment and providing for their families and some only prioritize health when needed. Even though an existing CVD program is being implemented where free services are given, some patients after their initial visit in the health centers and after they receive free medicines, they don't come back so

the health workers have difficulty monitoring their health progress. According to Ms. Sara, extra effort and strategy is needed to influence patients especially those who are uncooperative to improve their health status. With the help of a multidisciplinary team of health workers in her area, Ms. Sara is able to face the challenge. The community where Ms. Sara works is located in an urban area so the health stations are fairly accessible, so the health team strategized a way to make it easier for patients to receive CVD program services and also to ensure their proper monitoring. They created a system where the patients would be screened in health stations and after the screening would proceed to the main health center to receive their free medicines and other services not available in the stations. This method is effective according to Ms. Sara because they observed that they can monitor patient's progress and they can also guarantee that the patients return for their follow-up visit. The health team also made sure that these services are always available so that patients will not be discouraged.



**Ms. Ceasara  
Morales**  
NCD Nurse  
Coordinator for Davao  
City, Philippines.

When asked about the success of the CVD program Ms. Sara said that "The program is a success because of the increased number of registered patients in our community and an increase in the awareness of NCD's. Although we face a lot of challenges especially in changing patient's behavior, we continue to give services because I believe that effective health counseling and constant visibility will help in addressing it." Ms. Sara is a fervent believer in the local health system and for her proper implementation and dedication will help the community achieve optimum health and wellness.

