

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL ISSUE

## CLOSING THE SDG AND UHC GAPS: THE PHILIPPINE PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

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In commemoration of its 54<sup>th</sup> year in its designation as a Center for Public Health by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), we have put together ten articles which we felt embody the spirit of what the University of the Philippines Manila, College of Public Health (UP CPH) as one of the Regional Centers of the Tropical Medicine and Public Health Network (TROPMED), stands for. Our theme for this special issue is **Closing the SDG and UHC Gaps: The Philippine Public Health Research Experience** which highlights the role of the Regional Center in producing knowledge that addresses the priorities of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and strengthens the Universal Health Care (UHC) implementation. We covered current public health challenges on infectious diseases including neglected tropical diseases and antimicrobial resistance (AMR), maternal health financing, participatory health care, and quality of health data.

I will take this opportunity to situate the contributions to this issue alongside the historical background of the UP CPH

and its designation as a Center for Public Health by SEAMEO over the past 54 years.

The UP CPH was established in 1927 as a unit of the University of the Philippines and served as a training ground for medical officers in the Philippine Health Service and was initially called the School of Sanitation and Public Health. In 1965, the College was bestowed with the honor of being designated as a National Center for Public Health by the SEAMEO, and later as a designation as Regional Center in 1993. Also, through its linkage with international agencies such as the World Health Organization/ UNDP/World Bank, German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) of the Federal Republic of Germany, Fogarty International and JICA, the research and training capabilities of the Centre has been strengthened particularly in the fields of medical microbiology, parasitology, environmental and occupational health, and community health development.

We are also strongly influenced by the vision of UP CPH as a Center of Excellence and Leadership in Public Health that is strategically responsive to national and global development. With these ideas

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in mind, each article was thoughtfully selected and offers a unique perspective in furthering the discussion on the SDGs and UHC.

We hope that through this collection of articles, the Tropical Medicine and Public Health community will discover new insights that will pave the way to further knowledge and innovation in this field, moving toward sustainable development.

In keeping with the theme, each article will tackle an aspect of the SDGs will provide some insight into how the Philippines and similar countries might strengthen efforts towards achieving UHC. To start, AMR poses a threat to global health due to widespread misuse and overuse of antimicrobials and their assimilation to products. Alon *et al* investigated the antimicrobial susceptibility of *Salmonella enterica*, an enteric pathogen acquired from the consumption of contaminated or undercooked food such as chicken, which may be fatal in cases of systemic infections. Results of this study contribute to strengthening public health interventions against Salmonellosis. Another article by Bungay *et al* explored the use of probiotics as a potential alternative treatment and preventive measure against resistant strains of Enterotoxigenic *Escherichia coli* (ETEC) which is a common cause of traveler's diarrhea. Their findings will prove useful in order to decrease the use of conventional antibiotics in ETEC. Together these studies will be vital contributions in the fight against AMR.

On the subject of contamination and preventing the spread of disease, Suarez *et al* investigates healthcare-associated infections (HCIs) and how alcohol-based rubs may be a contributing factor in its spread in healthcare institutions.

Meanwhile, Cleofas *et al* looks into the prevalence of fungal growth in flood prone elementary schools which may increase the risk of contracting fungi related diseases in children with developing immune systems. In the article by Belizario *et al*, the prevalence of soil-transmitted helminthiasis (STH) was studied and were correlated with data on sanitation and nutrition of school-age children. While tackling different subjects, their results offer critical information which may help in risk reduction, improving sanitation and hygiene, and other factors such as water quality and flood control, all leading to improved health outcomes.

In any aspect of evidence-based research, the ways in which data is obtained and measured, and its quality is important in order to arrive at policies and initiatives that are reflective of the pressing issues that the country faces. In the study by Linso *et al*, they explore the critical role in which data collection systems, data standards and data reporting play in the health system. Garcia *et al* looks at Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) in cases of STH in order to determine whether it can help in instituting cost-effective control strategies and arrive at effective healthcare decisions for this often-neglected tropical disease. Another way in which data can be utilized is through the use of forecasting, Medina *et al* utilizes a time series modeling on dengue surveillance data as a way to predict future outbreaks and implement more proactive policies.

Finally, UHC cannot be achieved unless there is solid implementation of programs that support it and an equitable health insurance program to provide financing. The study by Nisay *et al*, which reviews Healthy Batangueño 2020 - a

model initiative for citizen engagement to healthcare, will be critical in emphasizing the importance of the participation of citizens in health, the factors that affect health seeking behavior and discovering ways in which we can improve the implementation of health programs. On the subject of health financing, Reyes *et al* studied benefit packages of the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) for those under maternity care. The findings of their study will be key in emphasizing the importance of having universal health coverage, awareness of available services and in addressing the gaps in policies which

would ultimately help in the reduction of maternal deaths in low to middle income countries such as in the Philippines.

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