

## Correspondence

# Prevention and planning as important factors in ensuring public health in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic

### ABSTRACT

A recent correspondence discussed that in trying times, technology can help be applied toward epidemiology to benefit communities by building a basic surveillance system. This suggested development in Honduras can be utilized in the Philippines to improve the State's handling of health emergencies. With this, this paper accentuates the importance of prevention and planning to ensure public health in the Philippines, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords** COVID-19, planning, prevention

Throughout history, different health emergencies have been experienced by humanity. With this, diverse ways have been done to survive each difficulty. For this reason, a recent correspondence discussed that in trying times, technology can help be applied toward epidemiology to benefit communities by building a basic surveillance system.<sup>1</sup> Following this idea, the development done in Honduras can be a model for the Philippines when it comes to handling health emergencies.

A 38-year-old female, Chinese national, was the first case of COVID-19 or coronavirus in the Philippines and was reported on 20 January 2020. Her companion, a 44-year-old male Chinese national, tested positive for COVID-19 and died on 1 February 2020. On 7 March 2020, 420 confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported.<sup>2</sup> Six months after the first case of COVID-19, in July 2020, the Philippines suffered among the worst cases of the COVID-19 outbreaks. The country has the second-highest confirmed cases and deaths in the ASEAN, next to Indonesia, which is inflated with its weak healthcare system. The Philippine Congress, through the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act, has allocated US\$5.37 billion for the COVID-19 pandemic, where US\$3.9 billion has been allotted for the implementation of the emergency subsidy program and US\$1.4 billion for funding health requirements and other services.<sup>3</sup>

As part of the preventive measures made by the Inter-Agency Force for Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IAFMD) and the National Task Force (NTF), they

created a national action plan to mitigate the spread of the virus in the country. As a response, the government applied the Prevent, Detect, Isolate, Treat, and Reintegrate (PDITR) strategy in a bid to 'adapt to the new normal'.<sup>4</sup> This strategy aims to control the spread of the virus and to ensure public health safety among the citizens. Also, this strategy encourages the constituents to continue following the minimum health standards, including regular hand washing, wearing of face mask and face shield and observing social distancing. As part of the procurement and deployment program of the vaccines, the government decided to have a geographical priority due to the limited vaccines. Fr Nicanor Austriaco, OP, suggests mass vaccination of at least 75% of its population to end the spread of virus in the country.<sup>5</sup>

However, it is important to highlight that the country is still not close to 'flattening the curve'. Several factors were said regarding this matter. Some citizens complained that there are Filipinos who are not following the necessary protocols, while some point to the government's mishandling of the pandemic. The latter is a known complaint because it was claimed by some citizens that the Philippine government did not do any action when the first case of COVID-19 was discovered.<sup>6</sup> Considering that the COVID-19 cases in the Philippines still rise after a year, the Philippine government should carefully identify the procedures and preventive measures which will ensure improvement in public health with organized planning. Thus, the Philippine government must

cautiously establish protocols that would not undermine the public health and ensure proper use of allocated budget and establish surveillance systems that would be available for handling future health emergencies. Like Honduras, the Philippine government must foresee that there can be a possibility for another pandemic, which is why it is important to improve the preventive measures and establish a concrete plan in situations like the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this paper.

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## Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to all aspects of the manuscript.

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