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## DOH AND PHILIPPINE NURSES ASSOCIATION HOLD TOWN HALL TO PROMOTE VACCINE CONFIDENCE

**Press Release | 17 January 2021**

The Department of Health (DOH), together with the Philippine Information Agency, today held a town hall meeting with the Philippine Nurses Association (PNA) to advocate vaccination, and increase vaccine confidence as the government prepares for COVID-19 vaccination program roll out in February.

Recognizing nurses as important partners in the COVID-19 immunization program, the meeting shed light on the vaccine selection process and the national vaccination deployment plan. It also addressed issues on vaccine acceptance and its primary barriers, and how healthcare workers can lend a hand in effective risk communication and demand generation for vaccines.

During the town hall, health social scientist Prof. Nina Castillo-Carandang of the University of the Philippines Manila College of Medicine addressed issues on vaccine hesitancy and the crucial role that health workers play in increasing vaccine confidence. On the other hand, Dr. Marion Kwek of the Philippine Society for Microbiology and Infectious Diseases also discussed the current vaccines on the pipeline. Also present were DOH Undersecretary Myrna Cabotaje, Food and Drug Administration Dir. Gen. Eric Domingo, Department of Science and Technology (DOST) - Vaccine Expert Panel Head Dr. Nina Gloriani, and DOST Philippine Council for Health Research and Development Executive Dir. Jaime Montoya who provided a technical overview of the vaccine selection from clinical trial and emergency use authorization applications to deployment.

Aside from the presentations, the DOH and the members of the town hall panel also called for support to help dismiss misinformation and disinformation against COVID-19 vaccines. "Lahat kami sa DOH at sa buong Vaccine Cluster ay nananawagan sa lahat ng naririto na maging kampeon para sa ating mga bakuna. Nakasalalay sa tagumpay ng bakuna ng COVID-19 ang tiwala ng ating mamamayan sa halaga ng bakuna bilang instrumento ng pagpapanatili ng magandang antas ng pampublikong kalusugan," Health Secretary Francisco T. Duque III said as he rallied support from the members of PNA.

Meanwhile, Vaccine Czar Carlito Galvez Jr. pointed out that there are too many noises surrounding vaccines and assured that the country will only procure proven safe and efficacious vaccines and that the procurement process will be corruption-free, saying "Kaya ang Philippine Nurses Association ay hinihikayat po namin na tulungan po kami para i-bring forth ang level of confidence ng public uptake on our nationwide vaccination. Please help us by being our champions in your household and in your community." The vaccine czar further assured that frontliners will be prioritized in the immunization program and that they will only receive vaccines that passed the scientific evaluation and regulatory processes.

Part of the objective of the meeting is to also provide a venue for the participants to raise concerns and seek clarifications on the government's immunization plan. "It is important that healthcare workers will have a full understanding of COVID-19. It is important to have the necessary information of these vaccines for our healthcare workers to help in this drive. Safety is our priority," PNA President Dr. Rosalie de Leon said in her opening message.

“With the expected arrival of vaccines, the next challenge lies in increasing vaccine confidence for its consequent rollout,” the health chief said in a separate statement. “For this particular endeavor we will need all hands on deck. The government requires and will solicit the assistance of allied medical professionals such as nurses, midwives, pharmacists, and barangay health to aid us in making the COVID-19 vaccine deployment a success,” he added.

“We know that vaccines work and have great benefits. This is why we, as healthcare workers, have the responsibility to ensure that we afford these benefits to the common Juan and we can start doing this by making sure that people are adequately informed about the benefits of vaccines,” Sec. Duque urged.

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