

## 25 years of UP-PGH Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition



In the 1980s, when acute and persistent diarrhea, severe malnutrition and various liver disorders constituted a significant cause of morbidity and mortality among Filipino children, the need for a unit specialized to address these concerns was envisioned by the then Chair of the Department of Pediatrics Prof. Perla D. Santos-Ocampo. Through her innovative endeavors, the Section of Pediatric Gastroenterology and Applied Nutrition was formally established in 1986, offering a fellowship program in the subspecialty. At the time of inception, the Section was a recognized center of the World Health Organization as a Diarrheal Disease Research Unit, conducting researches on various types of oral rehydration solutions suitable for childhood diarrhea. A year later, after completing their respective training in Pediatric Gastroenterology, Dr. Juliet O. Sio-Aguilar and Dr. Elizabeth P. Gabriel-Martinez joined the team and provided new insights gained from their training.

Dr. Jossie Mariano-Rogacion became the first graduate of the 2-year fellowship training program of the Section. She subsequently became a Consultant of the Section and later pursued further training in pediatric nutrition at the Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, Canada. Two other graduates of the fellowship program later became members of the Section. Dr. Germana V. Gregorio joined the section in the year 2000 after finishing her fellowship training and obtaining a doctorate degree in pediatric hepatology at the King's College Hospital, University of London, United Kingdom. Dr. Ma. Lourdes G. Genuino joined the Section in January 2010 and has a joint appointment with the Department of Physiology of the UP College of Medicine.

The Section (subsequently renamed as Section of Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition) attends to patients with varied digestive disorders who are admitted in the pediatric wards or are consulting at the outpatient department. An estimated 1,600 children are referred to the section annually, 50% of whom have hepatobiliary disorders, 30% with gastrointestinal diseases, and 20% with nutritional and other disorders. Various services are offered including percutaneous and ultrasound-guided liver biopsy; diagnostic and therapeutic esophagogastroduodenoscopy and colonoscopy; and rectal imprint. In addition, anal manometry, 24-hour esophageal pH monitoring and hydrogen breath test are performed in coordination with the Department of Physiology of the University of the Philippines Manila, College of Medicine.

The Section takes pride in pioneering the subspecialty in the Philippines. The current three-year fellowship training remains the flagship program of the Section, preparing pediatricians to develop the skills for prompt and adept recognition of digestive disorders. For over two decades until 2008, it was the only center providing training in the subspecialty in the entire country. To date, it has produced a total of 25 graduates practicing in different regions of the country, in keeping with the thrust of disseminating the expertise of the subspecialty. All the graduates are board-certified by the Philippine Society of Pediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition. Of these, seventy five percent are in the academe while the rest are in private practice.

The various research outputs generated, especially during the years of collaboration with the World Health Organization, have earned for the Section the Most Outstanding Research Group Award in 1998, awarded by the University of the Philippines Manila. The presence of the Diarrheal Diseases Study Group, directed by Professor Santos-Ocampo, resulted in important publications on oral rehydration therapy and led to nationwide advocacy programs on the treatment and prevention of diarrheal diseases in collaboration with the Philippine Pediatric Society and Department of Health. Enhancement in teaching of diarrheal diseases was also prioritized in medical schools, in partnership with the Association of Philippine Medical Colleges. Findings from researches of the Section have contributed to a further understanding of the epidemiology of certain diseases among Filipino children such as the prevalence of  $\alpha$ -1-antitrypsin deficiency among cholestatic patients; tuberculosis of the liver; the prevalence of *H. pylori* infection; and the documentation of small bowel bacterial overgrowth in protein-energy malnutrition. Other significant researches of the Section have provided the basis for a change in standard practice of the subspecialty in the local setting such as the efficacy of various oral rehydration solutions, particularly glucose polymers, in the management of diarrhea; the cost-effectiveness of zinc in diarrhea; zinc supplementation in children with decompensated liver disease; and the protocol in the management of caustic ingestion.

The gift of healing of the digestive disorders of Filipino children remains the greatest legacy of the Section. The Section has served and saved countless lives amidst the limited resources available. Today's leaders in the field of pediatric gastroenterology in the country are the pioneers and the graduates of the postgraduate fellowship training program of the Section. After 25 years, it continues its three-pronged mission in providing evidence-based quality care; training of undergraduate medical students, pediatric residents, and postgraduate fellows; and conducting researches in the subspecialty to enhance recognition and management of digestive diseases in the local setting.

This issue is lovingly dedicated to our founding section chief, University Professor Emeritus and National Scientist, Perla D. Santos-Ocampo who up to these days continues to advise, inspire and motivate us and whose dedication and commitment to any endeavors are the ideals we all try to live with.

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