



Community Health Education, Services and Training in the Cordillera Region (CHESTCORE)

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DECENT JOBS AND LIVING WAGES TOWARDS HEALTH SERVICES TRULY SERVING THE PEOPLE!

CHESTCORE or the Community Health Education, Services and Training in the Cordillera Region stands with nurses in their struggle for full protection of their rights and welfare through sustainable jobs, just wages and humane conditions of work so that they can help ensure a health system that can truly serve our people especially the poor.

The brewing issue over continuing cases of hospitals providing nurse volunteer programs or trainings for a fee and nurses misled to believe these programs/trainings are a requirement for employment brings to fore disturbing realities in the nursing profession and the health situation in the country.

The already long-time unscrupulous practice of many government and private hospitals of providing nurse volunteer programs for a fee is exploitative and deceptive. In these programs, graduate nurses are asked to pay a large amount of money for a number of months stay in the hospitals usually doing the most difficult regular staff functions on a fulltime basis (8 hours a day) so that they can get a certificate of work experience. Through these programs, hospitals save by accepting nurse-volunteers instead of hiring them as regular staff nurses and further gain profit from the fees paid by these nurse-volunteers.

Professional organization of nurses assert that these registered professional nurses who are Bachelor of Science in Nursing graduates, have undergone clinical practicum in different specialty areas and have already passed the PRC Nurse Licensure Examinations no longer need this training. Further, they say that what foreign destination countries require is a 2-3 YEAR ACTUAL NURSING WORK EXPERIENCE and not the so-called ON-THE-JOB TRAINING or VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES no matter how long these are undertaken. If uninformed, this practice gives false hopes to many that their volunteer work will give them greater chances for employment.

Responding to this issue, DOH Secretary Enrique T. ONA, issued memorandum 2011-0238 mandating to terminate all "Nurse Volunteer Programs", "Volunteer Training Programs for Nurses" and all similar or related programs, in all DOH-retained hospitals in the Philippines. In the Cordillera, the four DOH-retained hospitals affected are Baguio General Hospital Medical Center (BGHMC), Luis Hora Memorial Hospital, Conner District Hospital and Far North Luzon General Hospital and Training Center. At the BGHMC alone, some 600 volunteer nurses have been affected.

Beyond stopping this practice, CHESTCORE believes that the government has to address its real causes: the worsening poverty, insufficiency of decent jobs and low wages which it remedies through its labor export policy and its neglect of the people's basic right to health.

The increasingly worsening poverty, insufficiency of decent jobs and low wages have pushed many Filipino families to enroll their children in the nursing profession to be able to work abroad. This has caused an overflow of nursing graduates who are pushed to undertake whatever it takes to fulfill their families' dreams, tightening belts to contest for the valued few slots in these hospital volunteer programs included.

Its continuous low and even decreasing appropriation for health in the national budget has relegated health concerns to the private sector which government cannot fully regulate and to government hospitals who are left to take care of themselves amidst many health problems. They have to remedy the very inadequate nurse to patient ratio as well as the lack of big funds for their gargantuan needs to sufficiently and effectively perform their tasks. The recent rise in dengue cases alone attest to this reality. The volunteer program has become a saving grace for government hospitals not given sufficient funds for their many needs and a profit-making venture especially for private hospitals.

These are the major concerns that veer the mission of medical institutions and the sincerity and dedication of Filipino medical professionals away from serving the people through quality and relevant health services.

We therefore call for the following:

Decent Jobs, just wages and rights to health workers!
Higher budgetary priority to health!

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