

IHS-PHS HEADACHE MASTER SCHOOL IN BACOLOD

Three years of intensive effort to increase access to headache care in the Philippines reached a milestone last month. What started with a small survey among healthcare providers (HCP) of different backgrounds (primary care physicians, nurses, midwives, community health workers), expanded over these years from a limited two-person initiative (Dr. Rami Burstein, then the IHS President, and Dr. Cory Macalintal, Board member of the PHS) to a far larger cooperation among the IHS, PHS, and over 40 PHS/PNA (Philippine Neurological Association) neurologists, whose energy and enthusiasm are transforming this initiative from words to deeds.



National survey team

Data collected from adults and adolescents living in all administrative regions of the Philippines islands showed that 22.4% of the people (population = 117 million) suffer from migraine, that 45% of them never consulted a HCP, that access to neurologists who are headache specialists is impossible to solve at the current ratio of headache specialists to headache (1:4.4 million) or migraine (1:1.2 million) patients, and that over 20 million migraine patients have no access to generic migraine medications such as triptans.

Accepting the view that neither headache specialists nor neurologists can solve the critical shortage in patients' access to HCP with basic training in headache medicine, the two societies (PHS/IHS) defined a multifaceted plan to teach other HCP how best to care for patients who seek help with their headaches. Much of the IHS-PHS Master School Program was designed with this plan in mind.



Bringing to Bacolod (the “City of Smiles” on Negros Island) 221 Filipino neurologists and primary care physicians, the PHS focused its Biennial program on basic knowledge needed to recognize common primary and secondary headaches, red flags, medication overuse headache, effective treatment approaches, and management of headache in children, adolescents, pregnant women, and the elderly.



PHS Biennial speakers (top) and attendees (bottom)

The second and third days featured the IHS-PHS Master School, bookended by a pre- and post-exam. Attendees included 138 neurologists from all regions of the Philippines as well as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, South Korea, Brunei, Vietnam, and Nepal. The program was designed to improve young neurologists' knowledge about diagnosis and treatment of all primary and secondary headaches and to enable them to go back to their communities and teach non-neurologist HCP the most basic things they need to know about diagnosis and treatment of migraine and other headaches. The faculty included 13 international speakers from the IHS (South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, New Zealand, Turkey, Canada, and the US), and 13 national speakers from the PHS.



IHS-PHS Master School faculty



IHS-PHS Master School faculty and attendings



Master School in session

To conclude the three days of intense learning, the PHS hosted a fellowship night featuring Filipino culture, with music and performances by attendees from the Philippines and participating countries.





Graduating fellows

Next steps

Advocacy: After the meeting, in Manila, representatives from the PHS Board and IHS met with the President of PhilHealth, the country's government health insurer, to advocate for them to supply migraine medications at an affordable price negotiated by Global Migraine Aid.

Awareness: Because 85% of Filipinos attend Catholic church services each Sunday, Drs. Burstein and Macalintal met with the second in command of the Roman Catholic Church of Manila to ask for Cardinal's support in publicizing ID Migraine in the church and making congregants aware that if they experience certain symptoms, they should seek medical help.



Left: Meeting with Vicar General & Moderator Curiae. Right: Meeting with President of PhilHealth (4th from left)