

WHAT THE ROLLING CLINIC IS ABOUT

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This is the first time I have been outside my country. And I think it is a wonderful opportunity for me. The German Doctors have given me several invitations to visit Germany, but I never thought I'd be here on this special day.

And I bring with me the hopes, the thanks, all the aspirations of the Philippine people. And if you give me ten minutes, I would like to thank first Father Ehlen, Dr. Harald, Dr. Lisa, Dr. Wolfgang, our "big bosses" here in Germany, and also the Embassy, which made a special effort to request the authorities in Manila to speed up my visa application. Without their kind intervention I would not be here today because under normal circumstances my visa would not have been issued on time. The Philippine staff there kept asking me: "Are you sure you

are an important person? What are you going to do there?" So I said: "I'm well invited to be there on their anniversary, and maybe going there and personally thanking the people who help us here in the Philippines is, I think, more than important!" They said "OK", but for this I would like to express special thanks to the head of the German Embassy, Ms. Birgit Fisel-Roste, who made such extra efforts on my behalf. I promised the staff that I would mention her name to you. So if you go to the Philippines and visit the Embassy, please tell them that I





mentioned her, OK? Thank you! And a big “thank you” also to my host, Dr. Henning Honecker, and his lovely wife.

My first two nights were very pleasant – I slept really well. And of course I thank my country director, Dietmar Schug, for his support. Honestly, it really was a hard time getting all the papers, but here I am in Germany. Now, with the Rolling Clinic, I have not given a presentation because many of the doctors who went to the Rolling Clinic have already had their own, unique experience of it. Sometimes I have to stop myself telling them that maybe Cagayan de Oro Rolling is better than Cebu Rolling or possibly Mindoro Rolling Clinic. Such comparisons are unwise – after all, each of the doctors who went to Mindanao, Cebu or Mindoro spent part of their lives there. I think you have a special and unique attachment to your experiences. So when I speak about the Rolling Clinic, bear with me and just imagine yourself back there again and all the places you have been to and the people you have met and the people you have helped. Perhaps you will remember all that as I continue with my talk. I would simply like to mention briefly why the Rolling Clinic is so important. For, as you know, we have various communities – places which are not accessible by car. The team has to walk for hours. And many of us Filipinos never understand “why bother?” Why do these doctors have to walk? They have cars – but the cars cannot get into these areas. Then they have to look for somebody to push. And they ask the community: Please, push! Sometimes we don’t think the doctors really have to go there. But the doctors insist. They ride on horseback through the rain and the heat of the sun – just to be there in the community to provide a health service. And a lot of Filipinos never understood that at that time.

Some of our Filipino colleagues never understood it. They said: “Well, you are rich. Is it for charity?” When we started, there were many problems. People were suspicious. “German Doctors from Berlin... were they communists?” “Here we have doctors coming in, maybe they are going to experiment on the Filipino people? And the children, because they’re doing immunization and all those things.” “No, they are treasure hunters.” “They are looking for Filipinas.” All sort of things

and thoughts like these were common when we started there. But you know what? Because you were able to reach those remote places, you truly showed them who you are. Not only what you are but also what the Committee of German Doctors stands for – its vision and mission.

Many of our families in the remote areas struggle to survive. They have large families with limited and undeveloped resources and because of aggravating poverty we assume that many of their children will die – from malaria, malnutrition and tuberculosis. This is partly because there is no or inadequate health services for these remote communities as provided by local government, especially among the indigenous people. There are even armed conflicts in some troubled areas here in Mindanao. I think you heard recently about the problem with the insurgents. But as Dr. Wolfgang was saying: “No risk, no fun”. Mindanao is still safe. We cannot go to those problematic areas, much as we would like to help them and that is a problem, although we sympathize with the people in those districts – the children, the mothers, the fathers. They look at things like checkpoints with soldiers and wonder: “Is this the service we get from the government?” They badly need basic health and welfare services and in times like this they see the government setting other priorities while their own lives are at stake.

So what is the Rolling Clinic about? We have only a few local doctors in the rural areas and a lot of our communities to be served. The people, especially in Bukidnon, have known you to be a team of white doctors with “flying machines”. Someone said in San Fernando that they could see your car flying over the mountains and over the trees. Yes, it’s true. He was a tribal chieftain! People were impressed by your “no retreat, no surrender approach.” You walk for hours to reach these areas, through dangerous terrain and across rivers. You ride horses, you fall, you complain a bit, and you go to the meetings and there we don’t hear you complain. And you come back here and share your experiences. And you kept on going back. And our people wonder “They don’t get tired, they’re super.” It was not a mission impossible for you, I think. You went to places where some of our Filipino doctors would not dare go. And I



always recall when I went to one of these places in the immunization area and the people I talked to said there was only one doctor whom they can remember in their lifetime, and that was a white doctor – they had never seen a brown doctor in their whole life. And I was suddenly confronted with that sad reality.

SERVING THE POOREST OF THE POOR

One doctor, and I think I will always remember her as we worked together in Miarayon, when she was going back home to Germany, she told me, “Oca, why us? Why do we have to come here to the Philippines? Can’t we just send money? And you Filipinos work for it and these are all your fellow men.” At that time I could not give her a good answer. I also asked that myself. I have been on the committee for 18 years now and I thought why? What could be the reason? Now after 18 years I realize what it is. I have felt and seen for myself your passion to serve the poorest of the poor. It may have come from Father Ehlen but this is very clear that you have the passion to serve and this is what distinguishes you from other colleagues. If you go to those areas once a year, well, that could be an outing or a picnic, but if you go there on a regular basis and if you leave your beautiful country, if you start traveling and sitting in a plane for so many hours...? There is more to that than a trip to Mindanao and even if they are tired and suffering from jetlag they undertake their Rolling Clinic tour without complaint on Mondays. I think it’s not only the humanitarian aspect, it goes beyond the humanitarian thing. We see the passion in it and we have learned a great deal from you. Our Rolling Clinic teams, what do they have? Well, they have the medicine and supplies and they have the cars, but they also have that vision – the vision of the committee strongly anchored in the teams and in the work they do. The whole commitment is summed up by our scholar Ruel Sagayo wearing his shirt with the slogan “Everybody needs love.”

The Rolling Clinic has become in a way a community organizer. You are like ambassadors or missionaries with that passion for serving the poorest of the poor and our people have seen for themselves your commitment and sacrifices with their own eyes. You have clearly shown us what it means to be humani-

tarian in the most direct way. The Manobo farmer who is a patient in one of our clinics in Valencia or Buda, the undernourished child in Valencia, diabetic patients in Cagayan de Oro – everyone appreciates your efforts. You have awakened all of us to see that need to serve. And I could see and feel that awakening in most of our staff. As an organizer, the Rolling Clinic teams have worked together with local and traditional health providers and in the process have produced many potential local leaders within the communities. And you know what? The best thing is that our people saw that you are so willing to share all your expertise and your knowledge with them. But in some parts of our country some of our specialists, doctors and health professionals are afraid to share: Because if you share all these things, you will lose your power. You showed us the value of these practical partnerships. You put a comprehensive care program in place, including maternal and child health and other healthcare schemes.

And when I stand before Filipino doctors and other hospital associations and organizations, I always tell them that in my 18 years with the committee I have been given a special opportunity to implement an “ideal” healthcare program. We have in a way a complete healthcare system, that is from the primary to the secondary to the tertiary level of healthcare. We have our own hospitals to serve those who need admissions, operations and further management from these remote communities. If one of our health workers thinks that a patient needs help, they can bring that person to a hospital and from there the treated patient can then return to his or her community and tell the community what you have done to help him. And we can always share these experiences and the problems we have had on different levels of operating our hospitals and implementing our programs. Other organizations and local government units are interested in knowing about our cost effectiveness as regards patient care, and often other administrators and heads of hospitals cannot believe it. This is due to the efficient administration of Dietmar, our Country Director.

So where does the Rolling Clinic go from here? What has been the impact? The truth is that when you go into our com-



munities, it is not only the identified needs which you see and sometimes we attend to. This is why the evaluation form we give you before leaving for a Rolling Clinic tour is so important. It is not just the identified needs or the “felt” needs as perceived by our teams and staff – we are more interested in their real needs and these are what we seek to focus on. And with our organization with limited resources, we have to focus on the kind of projects you can efficiently implement, and the sustainable assistance we can provide. We have a lot of projects in which some of our doctors are very active, and through their initiatives they were able to sustain them. We have family health classes, attended by men, old men, grandmothers. And I thought grandmothers would never attend family health classes, but the oldest grandmother we have is 82 years old. And as she waited, she was so happy, she was singing and dancing, because she had been invited to a family health class by the German Doctors.

With the identified real needs of the communities we have coordinated with other agencies like Green Mindanao for the construction of a safe water supply to some communities. According to our Regional Director in one of his annual reports recently, Region 10 (where most of our communities are served by a Rolling Clinic) now has the lowest child mortality rate in the whole country. When I heard about this, I asked myself how did this come about. Although the work was shared by numerous local health professionals and providers, the director told me that the German Doctors made a major impact in Bukidnon – and not only in terms of improved child health and the intensified immunization program but through strong links with a lot of health organizations, both government and private. Thanks to building, networking and efficient referral systems, we have been able to achieve full recognition of the committee’s works. The truth is that you have empowered us through what you have shared with us. The German Doctors have become an institution in Mindanao.

GRATITUDE TO THE GERMAN DOCTORS FOR THEIR DEDICATION

Augustino, one of our original health workers at Cabanglasan for many years, was elected mayor and then he brought with

him the values he had acquired when still a health worker with the German Doctors; he served Cabanglasan well for three terms. We have the husband of Ginging in San Fernando who became a town councilor, and we have Aporito of Pangatucan who was elected as a village councilor. All of these are health workers who entered the realm of politics. In the Philippines, if you want to change something, be an insider – get to the heart of the action and you can really decide on things! A lot of our health workers have become officials, such as village officials, town councilors and others bringing with them the values learned from the German Doctors and serving their communities well. Now they are serving the poorest of the poor. It’s contagious, actually. I am not saying this simply because you have sponsored my trip here to Germany, but it is a movement now. Many of our graduates from the family classes are so proud to wear t-shirts with the emblem of the German Doctors. And we can use this connection to solve some of our daily problems. If you have difficulties at the airport or with local government officials, you can say you have links to the German Doctors and things will be much easier. But then of course sometimes they ask for medicine!

Finally and very important on behalf of the Manila staff, the Cebu staff under Cecile, Cagayan de Oro, the Valencia staff, the Buda staff and thousands of our health workers, graduates from family classes and especially your patients, I would like to extend our sincerest thanks for devoting part of your life to us, showing us the real meaning of humanitarian help, for your commitment and your passion. And they thank not only the doctors but also the donors. Just two weeks before I left, I attended a graduation in Salay, where a mother aged 48 graduated from the mothers’ class. I will just translate what she said: “I had serious doubts at first about the mothers’ classes, then I realized my foolishness for not being part of them. You German Doctors “(she was crying and sobbing as she spoke)”, thank you so much for touching my life, making me a better person – not only more healthy but a better overall person. I will never forget you until the day I die.” Thank you and good day! //