

# COVID-19 vaccination roll out among Southern Philippines Medical Center health care workers

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As the biggest COVID-19 facility in Mindanao, Davao City's Southern Philippines Medical Center (SPMC) rolled out its first doses of COVID-19 vaccines to some of its frontline health care workers (HCW) last March 5, 2021.

The COVID-19 vaccination program in the Philippines is an extensive and comprehensive immunization campaign to help curb the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and protect the people against severe COVID-19. To expedite the vaccine procurement and administration process, the Republic Act 11525 or the "COVID-19 Vaccination Program Act of 2021" was enacted into law on February 26,

2021.<sup>1</sup> The Department of Health (DOH) and the National Task Force against COVID-19 (NTF), in partnership with local governments, have been tasked to implement, facilitate, and monitor the COVID-19 vaccination program.<sup>2</sup>

The DOH National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG), along with the DOH Technical Advisory Group (TAG), formulated the COVID-19 vaccination prioritization framework based on the World Health Organization (WHO) Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) roadmap for prioritizing uses of COVID-19 vaccines in the context of limited supply.<sup>3</sup> They identified priority population groups for vaccination based on the risks of exposure and death.<sup>4</sup> The priority population groups for vaccination of high-risk individuals are: A1 - workers in frontline health services, A2 - all senior citizens, A3 - persons with comorbidities, A4 - frontline personnel in essential sectors, including uniformed personnel, and A5 - indigent population.<sup>5</sup>

On March 1, 2021, the national government initiated the roll-out of the 600,000 doses of CoronaVac, developed by Sinovac Biotech Limited and donated by the Chinese government to the Philippines. On the first day of the roll-out, 756 frontline HCWs across six hospitals in Metro Manila received the vaccine.<sup>6</sup> In Davao City, the first batch of Sinovac COVID-19 vaccines that arrived on March 2, 2021 included 12,000 vaccine doses intended for 6,000 recipients.<sup>7</sup>

On the first day of the vaccination roll-out in Davao City, several HCWs of SPMC received their first COVID-19 doses. Dr. Ricardo Audan, SPMC's Medical Center Chief, was the first to be vaccinated. He said that approximately 150 to 200 doctors, nurses, and aides received their first doses on that day.

They are among the 5,900 SPMC personnel who are expected to receive the vaccine during the entire course of the vaccine roll-out.<sup>7</sup>

Prior to the initial roll-out, SPMC initiated a simulation exercise of the vaccination process flow. Vaccine committee members were assigned to their designated stations, led by a team leader that manages and supervises each station. Structural modifications, such as the conversion of the Outpatient Department (OPD) building ground floor into the first few vaccination stations (from registration up to screening) that lead outside to the Zonta Park for the last stations (vaccination and post-vaccination), were done to facilitate the vaccination process. (Note: In the later part of the vaccination roll-out, all stations were moved to the Zonta Park area.) Before the day of the vaccination, SPMC employees registered online to declare a few personal and clinical information, and set their vaccination schedules.

In the SPMC setup, vaccine recipients go through five stations: registration, counseling, screening, vaccination, and post-vaccination. Upon arrival, the vaccinees queue at the registration station where their schedule of appointment is confirmed, and the personnel-in-charge checks if their informed consent and health screening forms have been properly filled up. The vaccinees then proceed to the counseling station at the OPD lobby, where the physician-in-charge informs them about the importance and possible side effects of the vaccine. The next station in the vaccination process is the screening area, located at the Family Medicine Outpatient Clinic, where another physician inquires about the vaccinees' health condition, including the presence of comorbidities and medications taken, presence of food and/or drug allergies, recent history of vaccination, recent exposure to COVID-19, etc. Once the vaccinees have undergone screening, they are then directed to go to the vaccination station in the Molecular Laboratory Facility at the Zonta Park for vaccine administration. The final station

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in the vaccination process is the post-vaccination area, where physicians from the Internal Medicine and/or Emergency Medicine, along with several nurses and nursing attendants, monitor the vaccinees—i.e., check the blood pressure every 15 minutes and observe for any adverse drug reactions—for at least 30 minutes. Prior to discharge, the physicians-in-charge at the post-vaccination station instructs the vaccinees on what symptoms to watch out for at home, and what to do and/or who to contact when these symptoms occur.

According to the records of the Hu-

man Resource and Management Office of SPMC, as of 18 October 2021, the total number of fully vaccinated SPMC HCWs is 4,969. Of these, 3,546 received Sinovac, 818 received Astrazeneca, 527 received Pfizer Biontech, 19 received Gamaleya Sputnik V, 14 received Moderna, and 45 received Johnson & Johnson vaccines.

SPMC was one of the two (the other was Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center) facilities outside of Metro Manila to have rolled out the COVID-19 vaccination program among HCWs shortly after the first doses of the vaccines arrived in the Philippines.<sup>8</sup>

The commencement of SPMC's initial vaccination drive has set high hopes of preventing SARS-CoV-2 transmission, hospitalization, and death among SPMC's HCWs and, possibly, their families. However, with the emergence of new SARS-CoV-2 variants, HCWs are still grappling with the devastating impact of COVID-19 on the health care system. Optimizing the protection of HCWs against COVID-19 through vaccination and ramping up efforts to immunize the rest of the vaccine-eligible population are immensely important steps in effectively managing this pandemic.

### Contributors

VC contributed to the conceptualization of this article. The author wrote the original draft, performed the subsequent revisions, approved the final version, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of this report.

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