

Greed school

PFIZER, THE WORLD'S largest drug company, elevated to god status by the "D-O-Ms" here for its male wonder drug "Viagra," reportedly sued this cute administration.

In effect, the US-based Pfizer wants our own court to stop our own government from making humongous cuts in the price of a certain drug for the people's benefit.

It is called "amlodipine besylate," marketed here by Pfizer as "Norvasc," used for the treatment of hypertension (aka, high blood pressure).

Say what you will about this cute administration of Gloriaeta, but at least it wants to cut the prize of that particular medicine by almost 90 percent as soon as possible. That is, as soon as the Pfizer patent for the medicine expires in June next year.

The government firm PITC (Philippine International Trading Corp.) is now preparing for the importation of a much cheaper version of the drug starting June 2007.

"No way," Pfizer said, as it asks the court to stop such a strategic move of this cute administration and to make it pay a handsome amount for damages.

To the millions of you out there who need the medication, you know what it means. Pfizer simply wants you to cough up more money. Billions, actually!

Immediately, you know that Pfizer has a big PR problem.

Me, I think that Pfizer has a dark, horrible conscience.

SECRETARY Roberto Pagdangan, president of PITC, is fighting the Pfizer court case, saying it is nothing but a "legal maneuver."

He noted that Pfizer markets the same medicine—maybe with a different name but the same medicine nonetheless—in

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our neighboring countries.

That, to me, is just well and good. Pfizer, after all, has a patent for the medicine.

It's just that, according to Pagdangan, the price of the same medicine here are more than 700 percent more than in, say, India.

Again, that's more than 700 percent higher. Pfizer must think that we all did not even finish grade school in this country. Or that maybe we are still a US colony or something!

That's why PITC officially told Pfizer that it would import the same Pfizer brand of medicine from India, but not until the patent would have expired in June 2007.

To speed up the process, PITC has already submitted samples to the Bureau of Food and Drugs, shorting the process by 18 months.

In other words, as soon as the Pfizer patent expires, the drug would be available here at prices some 90 percent cheaper.

Hurriedly, Pfizer ran to the court in Makati, seeking a TRO.

Uh-oh, how easy is it to get a TRO again nowadays?

NOW, it is up to the court. I cannot pretend to know about the patent law. I leave that to the croco... este, the lawyers.

But as a citizen and consumer of this country, I register here my take on the Pfizer court case: It is pure greed.

As I said, the medicine "amlodipine besylate," sold by Pfizer here as "Norvasc," which it also sells in India as "Amlgard," is used for the treatment of hypertension.

Every six years, we conduct a national nutrition survey, through the Nutrition Research Institute under the DOST.

The latest one showed that 22 percent of Filipino adults have hypertension. This means that millions of Filipinos need to take the medicine—rich and poor alike.

Actually, the statistics can frighten you just by looking at the incidence of poverty in this country, which incidentally boasts of having some of the most expensive drugs in the whole wide world, probably next only to the United States.

Get this, Pfizer guys: Some 15 percent of Filipinos live in extreme poverty—emphasis on the word EXTREME!

THAT means millions upon millions of breathing human beings are surviving on less than P50 a day.

They cannot afford food—much less expensive medicine, priced at 700 percent higher than in other countries.

And do you know how much more the poor Filipino must fork out to Pfizer, say, if the court grants the easy-to-get TRO?

In effect, through the TRO, Pfizer will still enjoy a monopoly on the hypertension drug for 18 more months.

In those months, Pfizer can expect to sell something like P2.39 billion.

Since the price locally is 700 percent higher than the imported version, the poor Filipinos—already sick as they are—will have been duped to the tune of P2.1 billion.

Hypertension, lest we forget, is a life-threatening disease. I mean, people take medicine such as "Norvasc" of Pfizer to stay alive.

It's not as if "Norvasc" is only just like Viagra. It's not a ... well, "recreational" pill!