

## Unfair to Norvasc

WE SEE THE NEED TO ISSUE A CLARIFICATORY statement relative to the column, "Why Filipinos are dropping dead" (PDI, 4/3/06), of Neal C. Cruz.

1. The claim that people are dying of complications from hypertension because they can't afford to buy Norvasc is unfair. Norvasc is not the only medicine for hypertension. There are many other anti-hypertensive medicines available in the market, many of which are off-patent. These off-patent medicines are manufactured locally and sold at low prices.

2. Our Intellectual Property Code (RA 8293) grants patent protection for 20 years for inventors and researchers as an incentive for them to continue investing time, effort and money to develop new products. Weakening patent protection can stifle research and innovation, thereby diminishing the frequency of the introduction of new, innovative medicines into the market.

3. The issue between Pfizer and the Philippine International Trading Center—on the latter's application for registration of a Norvasc parallel import—has been discussed in a meeting between PITC president Roberto Pagdanganan and officers of the Pharmaceutical & Healthcare

Association of the Philippines (PHAP), with the objective of resolving differences in an amicable way, taking into account the needs and concerns of both sides.

4. Cruz was right when he wrote that "other companies are free to manufacture their own generic versions" upon expiry of a patent. This is what happens in the local pharmaceutical market. And this is also the reason why there are hundreds of low-priced medicines in the market. Patients simply need to be informed that they can actually choose an affordable generic equivalent to a prescribed medicine.

5. Cruz also suggested that the government import cheap medicines. If the objective is to supply the market with cheap medicines, the government may import raw materials for distribution to local manufacturers, or import in bulk processed medicines to be packed locally and distributed through normal distribution channels. This is the way to supply cheap medicines to the public. This is precisely the approach taken by other countries to reduce medicine prices.

6. We also believe that promoting generic medicines provides a less expensive alternative for the Filipino people.

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