

EDITORIAL

Public health & nat'l interest central to Pfizer price dispute

THE charge that Pfizer, Inc., a giant pharmaceutical company, has been selling medicine in the Philippines at prices higher by some 650 to 730 percent than in other countries makes for an indictment of the heartlessness of big business.

Big business is portrayed minus a human face often enough, the familiar term corporate responsibility being normally equated with profit-making.

That this especially applies to the manufacture of medicine or pharmaceutical products makes the portrayal even more severely to the point.

Right or wrong, the drug industry is not viewed like any common profit-making venture, the nature of its business being the alleviation of human suffering. The charge against Pfizer obliterates the distinction.

The revelation on the shocking price disparity inflicted by Pfizer on Filipinos came from Secretary Roberto M. Pagdanganan, chairman of the state-owned Philippine International Trading Corporation that was sued by the pharmaceutical firm for patent infringement.

Specifically mentioned in the case was the medicine amlodipine besylate marketed by Pfizer under the brand name Norvasc.

Now it's Pagdanganan turn to make a charge: The Pfizer huge price disparity poses a terrible disadvantage to the Filipino people.

The Pagdanganan figures showed that Norvasc is sold for P44.75 per 5mg tablet and P74.57 per 10 mg tablet. The same medicine is sold by Pfizer in India under the brand name Amlogard at the equivalent of P5.98 per 5 mg tablet and P8.96 per 10 mg tablet.

In Pakistan, the same Norvasc is sold at the equivalent of P8.74 per 5 mg and P17.09 for 10 mg tablet.

If true, the charge has turned the tables on the drug firm, bound by the World Health Organization Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights and the 2001 Doha Declaration to make health care goods and services available at affordable costs.

Under the PITC goal to reduce the prices of essential medicines by half, importation parallel to those of private companies like Pfizer is now being resorted to.

Considering that less than 30 percent of Filipinos have access to medicine, principally because of the exorbitant prices prevailing in the market, the PITC-Pfizer dispute should be settled in favor of the primacy of national interest and public health.