

Senior citizens back importation of affordable medicines

SENIOR citizens today strongly supported the government's move to import medicines to bring down the prices of drugs, including those for hypertension, stressing that their high cost is one of the reasons many old people are succumbing to high blood pressure and other complications as they could not afford the stiff cost of medicines.

Speaking on behalf of senior citizens, Patricio M. Inocencio, president of the Federation of Senior Citizens, San Miguel, Bulacan, chapter, said they are thankful the government is looking for ways to bring down the cost of medicines by "parallel importation."

"Nagpapasalamat kami dahil gumagawang paraan ang gobyerno natin para bumaba ang presyong gamot dahil karamihan sa matatanda ay nahihirapan sa

sobrang mahal ng gamot," Inocencio said.

He revealed that four to five senior citizens are dying of hypertension weekly.

He criticized the move of Pfizer, Inc., a multinational company, to stop the government, particularly the state-owned Philippine International Trading Corp. (PITC), from importing Norvasc, a drug for the treatment of hypertension, and reselling it at a very much lower price.

"Sa halip na tulungan nila ang gobyerno para makapagbenta ng gamot na mababa ang presyo ay iniipit pa nila," Inocencio said, referring to the civil case filed by Pfizer against PITC and the Bureau of Food and Drugs before the Makati Regional Trial Court for alleged patent infringement. He said the drug company knows it that millions of senior citizens and middle-aged persons could not afford the high cost of

medicines for hypertension, specially the popular doctor-prescribed brands.

Secretary Roberto M. Pagdanganan, chairman and president of PITC, has revealed that based on recent price survey in the Philippines, Norvasc is sold for P44.75 per 5mg tablet and P74.57 per 10mg tablet.

However, the same medicine is sold by Pfizer in India under the brand name Amlogard at the equivalent of P5.98 per 5mg tablet and P8.96 per 10mg tablet.

Although Norvasc and Amlogard are both made by Pfizer, the company sells the medicine in the Philippines at prices which are 650 percent and 730 percent higher than in India for the 5mg and 10mg tablets, respectively.

This is the reason why PITC plans to import the same Pfizer brand of medicine from India when the

patent would have expired in June 2007.

Inocencio said senior citizens around the country are rallying behind the move of PITC to import Norvasc so that the drug could become affordable to many people.

"Nagpapasalamat din kami kay Presidente Arroyo at pinayagan niya 'yung tinatawag na parallel importation ng gamot," Kagawad Romulo Pineda of Bulacan said.

It was President Arroyo who directed PITC to undertake parallel importation for medicines as a viable option to reduce the rising cost of drugs in the country and provide the masses with access to affordable medicines.

It was learned that parallel importation is a program adopted by many countries, including Japan and the European Union, to bring in lower-priced medicines from other countries.