Hepatitis C Treatment in the Philippines

December 6, 2019 By Greg Jefferys

The situation for people with Hepatitis C in the Philippines is difficult, especially for poor people.

Filipinos with Hep C face three major barriers to accessing treatment. These are the cost of the Hep C medicine, the cost of testing and the social stigma associated with having Hep C.

I am going to lead into my story about Hepatitis C treatment in the Philippines in a roundabout kind of way, to explain my connection to the Philippines.

My Connection to the Philippines

My earliest memory of being aware of the Philippines as a place is from a story I read when I was about 8 or 9 years old. It was in one of the primary school “reading primers” that were in circulation in Australia back in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

I remember that the story enthralled me; it was about a Filipino family who lived in a village by the sea and made a living from fishing from their little traditional trimaran. Sometimes they fished with cormorants and sometimes they fished with hand woven nets at night by the light of bamboo torches.

I really don’t remember many more details. Maybe there a typhoon, maybe there was a shark, but the gist of the story and a patchwork of images stayed in my mind for the rest of my life as representing a good life lived simply and happily.

My next interaction with the Philippines was when I was doing my arts degree with a double major in history and archaeology in the 1990s. I decided to write a short paper on the Manila Galleon trade between Mexico and Manila.

I learned about the conquest of the Philippines by Spain and then by the USA.

Move forward to the 21st century and in 2012 my son married a wonderful Filipina woman and the connection with the Philippines became much more personal when I, my wife, and our extended family traveled to my daughter-in-law’s village in Cebu to attend the wedding.

Now I have a Filipino grandson so my connection with the Philippines runs very deep indeed.

In the midst of all this I learned I had Hepatitis C in 2014 and in 2015 I started helping people around the world to access affordable Hepatitis C treatment.

Michael de Mesa: A Real Filipino Hero

I got a lot of inquiries for help with Hepatitis C treatment from all around the world but very few from the Philippines. Then in late 2015 I helped a Filipino man named Michael to buy generic Hepatitis C treatment for himself.

I did not know at the time that Michael was a famous Filipino actor named Michael de Mesa.

After successfully curing his Hep C, encouraged by his wife Julie, Michael bravely went public about his battle with Hepatitis C and mentioned that an Australian man had helped him get the medication.

Suddenly I began getting lots of inquiries from people in the Philippines who had Hep C.

A this stage the price of a generic Hep C treatment was over US$1,000 and it was not long before I realised that even the generic Hepatitis C medication was very difficult, or impossible, for most Filipinos. It was just too much money.

I also realised that the price was not the only barrier that people in the Philippines had to overcome to access Hep C treatment. Many people in the Philippines do not have bank accounts, so the normal methods of payment were not an option.

Even the fee for sending the money by Western Union was almost one week's wages.

To put the cost of treatment into perspective, the average wage in the Philippines is around US$50 per week, most of which is spent covering the basic costs of living such as food and shelter for a family.

In other words, if a treatment cost US$1,000 that was 6 months' wages. But for most Filipinos there is almost no disposable income in their weekly wage. Maybe $5 or $10 at the most. So for a Filipino to save $1,000 would take 2 to 4 years of saving every spare cent and would only be possible if no other emergencies arose.

And, of course, many people earn less than $50 per week. And many people have no disposable income left over each week's expenses.

Hep C and the Filipino Public Health Service

Like most Third World countries there is no free public health service in the Philippines. Wealthier Filipinos have health insurance but mostly Filipinos just try to live frugally and to put a little aside for emergencies. In desperate situations they will borrow from relatives if something like a medical emergency comes up. In many ways the Philippines is like a poorer version of the USA, where the wealthy do fine and the poor struggle along from day to day, just getting by.

On top of this there is no real knowledge of how widespread the Hep C infection rates are in the Philippines.

I have not been able to get any exact figures out of the Philippines health services online information and, despite many attempts, I have not been able to get even one single reply from the emails I have sent to related Philippine government entities.

To read the rest of this entry, click here. Greg's blog is reprinted with permission, and the views are entirely his.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/blog/hepatitis-c-treatment-philippines