

The Legacy of Dr. Stephen Zuellig in Public Health¹

In 2008, Ambassador Roberto Romulo, then the incoming chair of the Zuellig Foundation, asked me, “If Dr. Stephen Zuellig wants the Foundation to focus on health for the poor, what will the intervention be?”

It was, on hindsight, a strategic question; which I later answered with, “Improve health facilities and services where the poor go. And for that you need interventions for mayors to improve their health leadership and governance.”

This response is counterintuitive. Nearly two decades after the devolution of primary health services, the promise of better local health services and improved health outcomes remained partially fulfilled due to the limited preparation or commitment of local executives to improve local health services.

This gap must be addressed, but the intervention comes with great risks, but must be faced in the words of Dr. Zuellig, with “courage and steadiness.”

From the very start, we knew the Foundation will be guided by the Zuellig family values: sense of duty and clarity of purpose; leadership and integrity; good management; and reliability.

The initial targets of the Foundation were modest: 50 rural municipalities of about 1.5 million beneficiaries from five provinces spread over five years. These targets meant we were to train 150 mayors, municipal health workers and community leaders. After this period, better health outcomes will be achieved, especially in the reduction of maternal mortalities in these municipalities.

¹ This eulogy was delivered by Ernesto D. Garilao, President, Zuellig Family Foundation at the memorial of Dr. Stephen Zuellig at the Peninsula Manila, Makati City on January 26, 2017.

After five years, the Foundation has far exceeded its targets:

- We targeted 50 municipalities by 2013. We had 213 by then, and in 2016, we had 634.
- We targeted 150 health leaders trained in 2013. We had 1,790 by then, and last year had 2,068 health leaders trained.
- In all, the population benefitting using the Foundation's health leadership and governance approach has reached 56 million.
- Further, it was shown that the approach, properly implemented, will show better maternal health results.

In addition, it has moved to 32 provinces, 14 of which are currently improving the provincial health system linking both curative care at the province and primary healthcare at the municipal level.

It has moved to the Department of Health (DOH), especially to the regional offices, which saw the importance of empowering mayors and governors to improve health system and services.

It has further moved to 12 universities nationwide partnering with the DOH regional offices and providing the leadership and governance training for mayors and DOH personnel. Some have even offered the same leadership approach to the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Population Commission and recently, the Office of the Vice President.

The health leadership and governance approach has mainstreamed.

Dr. Zuellig's focus on "health for the poor" and the "steadiness" of the support he and his brother Gilbert gave was game changer in the role of local governments in public health.

I was privileged to have occasional conversations with Dr. Zuellig.

He asked about the Foundation's work in Bicol and Mindanao. He said we need to be there.

He smiled when I reported we now have multilateral partners like the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund

(UNICEF), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and there is also the MSD for Mothers. Their representatives are here, and we thank them.

He asked whether the mayors really find the program useful.

He probed our partnership with the DOH.

From his questions, he reveals his priorities; what needs to be done; and what needs to be rechecked.

Two years ago, he asked to meet in Hong Kong, and near the end of our conversation, he expressed his “pleasure” on what the Foundation has become and what it had done.

I could only interpret what “pleased” him. I think he saw through the metrics, the activities and the numbers. Behind all these were the Zuellig values he stood for – duty and purpose, integrity, and reliability. The family foundation had become a vehicle through which the Zuellig values were co-shared with the public sector.

Thank you, Dr. Stephen Zuellig for your vision, your leadership and your generosity.

Thank you for the “steadiness” you gave the Zuellig Family Foundation as an expression of your and your brother Gilbert, and the Zuellig family’s commitment to the country of your birth.

On behalf of the Zuellig Family Foundation Chair, Ambassador Roberto Romulo, the Board, management and staff, let me extend our condolences to the family of the late Dr. Stephen Zuellig, his sons Peter and David and his daughters Susan and Joan, their spouses, his grandchildren and nephews.

Thank you and a blessed good afternoon to all.