COVID-19 Tales: Stigma, Prejudice and Triumph
EDITORIAL

NEW NORMAL. NEW LIFE. NEW FUTURE

Everything in this world seems to change in a matter of seconds. Life appears to collapse as every inch of fear and sadness is seen in the face of one another. As everyone says, life would not be the same again.

2020 was not a year to be happy about, though some may claim it was. There was the Taal Volcano eruption, the tension between the United States and Iran, the massive Australian bushfire, floods in Indonesia, earthquake in Turkey, and now the unending dilemma on coronavirus. You can hear the despair of every nation even through the deafening silence in the streets. Nothing can be compared from yesterday. On the funny side is the panic buying in the supermarkets, and I myself can attest to that. You can hear people uttering “It takes a virus to address the traffic in Metro” and so on. Nothing is Normal.

March 17, 2020 was the start of our homebound life, the reality of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). For about two (2) months, many people were in transition from excitement, confusion, boredom, fear and anger. Many of us didn’t realize the bigger picture and the impact it may have on our life. Days and weeks have passed and people started to vent and believe in myths and erroneous assumptions.

Then came the Modified ECQ, small businesses started to see hope as people who belong to the low socio-economic group became accustomed to walking 2 to 3 hours just to go to and from their workplace and home. The government began to struggle with debts which were made to ease the burden of its citizens. The never-ending rallies identical to every administration came back to life. It is during the declaration of General Community Quarantine (GCQ) last June 01, 2020 where you can feel and realize that Filipinos are either optimistic or pessimistic with this new normal. New normal in the sense that you need to keep distance from one another – paying respects to the elderly by means of a hand gesture like “mama” or kiss, which is part of the Filipino culture, is now a no-no, as well as shaking of hands. Everyone is required to wear face mask, whereas before people appear to be strange once you see them wearing a mask in the streets. Alcohol and sanitizer, in exchange for pressed powder, is now a common thing in everyone’s pocket. Internet is a must in every household if you want to cope with this new normal.

The lives of many people and the career of the government in handling the situation created a myriad of misconceptions. Filipinos are losing their trust in the Department of Health (DOH) because of abrupt changes in policies and guidelines about COVID-19 and puzzled by the many conflicting news and technical aspects in handling the situation. People started to lose their jobs or were forced to do more than what their jobs originally entailed, with hardly little choice on the matter. Many, if not all, entrepreneurs started to break into their savings in order to sustain their business.

What is more concerning is the mental anguish and trauma of every Filipino brought about by this pandemic – the feeling of helplessness of the people who had family members or loved ones infected by the virus and the fear of not knowing anything about them due to the nature of quarantine. Many became paranoid and submerged to the idea of self-pity.

Do you think we can translate this new normal to a new future? It would be possible if the government will provide efficient and effective way of helping its citizens that will reach the widest possible number of people, not just by providing financial support but by gaining the trust of Filipinos without creating confusion due to their different stands. They must develop and implement a more concise and definite plan of action in fighting the effect of this dreadful disease. Every Filipino should learn to adapt and accept that we need to help ourselves in order to help others. Be more observant and follow the necessary requirements that have been put in place for our own protection. Start believing that we can fight this pandemic if we move forward and throw away the bad days that had passed. Let’s start this new beginning and move away from the fears and misconceptions stemming from hoaxes and wrong information.

As the saying goes, “Life goes by in a blink of an eye so live life.”
COVID-19 Tales, Stigma, Prejudice & Triumph

By: RAMON D. YPIL AND KAREN LOU C. TORRES

As the world continues to rebuild from the grim and immense impact of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), people find ways to adapt to the changes.


The stigma plagues individuals of opportunities to define quality of life and freedom to affiliate oneself with diverse groups like what happened to the widow Nancy Layu whose husband was a frontline. Kaunggutom nga pagdi ng COVID-19 cases, yung sasawi na nakanini nga yung dibilis, hindi mahalak. Di na agad ang sasawi na niiso nga kasama sa kapital, kahit na nagbigat na siya. “Saan na yung tandaan ko sa kanya, yung anhing at kung saan ay nagbigat, na kapuno nakagawa ako sa tuma mong sakit.”

On the other hand, Maria, 35, who is also a frontline, turns a new leaf in her life after contracting the virus. Like many people her age, Maria is a wanderlust. She tries to explore the food and culture of other countries, but it took an abrupt turn due to the virus. “One day upon returning home, I decided to cook one of my favorite Italian dishes. After a long day at work, it took me a while to get the recipe right.”

Response of NPD: The strategies we encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic mostly involved the risk of COVID-19 transmission among our personnel while providing public safety services, especially in areas with high cases of COVID-19. During this pandemic, as frontliners we encountered hard-hearted fellow Filipinos who did not observe proper social/physical distancing, so we did remind them in kind and courteous way that they should wear face mask and observe proper social/physical distancing in public places all the time. More so, we encountered insufficient supply of PPEs.

Response of EPD: By keeping updated on the current guidelines issued by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) and the PNP, including the latest studies of the World Health Organization, is my way of adapting to the present situation.

During the first week of May 2020, I crafted “New Normal” policies to be observed by all EPD personnel. These include work schedules, use of technology in conferences and meetings, minimal conduct of command activities and observance of social distancing inside and outside the office, wearing of basic protective equipment, and keeping a handy bottle of alcohol in the offices and in the pockets of everyone.
Response of MPD: We adapted to the situation through available technology, such as Viber and Messenger applications, which significantly affected the psychosocial and mental health of our personnel coupled with the fear that we might infect our family should we come home after rendering duty in the field.

Response of NPD: We conceptualized the Skeletal Workforce and observe “New Normal” scheme in our office at least to eliminate the rapid transmission of COVID-19 among our personnel, yet we were able to submit the NPD compliances to higher headquarters within the prescribed period of time. This is the best thing that we can contribute since we need to sustain ourselves to better serve the public and to be able to feed our families. As time passed by, we have adjusted to the situation and learned how to cope with the challenges.

Some of the initiatives that are being implemented as follows: 1) Proper alignment of funds intended for procuring safety equipment and other materials such as, but not limited to, PPEs, facemasks, face shields, gloves, foot cover, alcohol and soap for the use of our personnel; 2) Continuous information dissemination and updates about COVID-19 and IATF-EID guidelines to our personnel, as well as to the community we serve; and 3) Weekly disinfestation and disinfection of CDOI offices and forward operations base. The Cagayan City Police Station is adapting to the present situation by staying positive despite the crisis.

As frontliners and the last line of defense against the pandemic, we have to take care of ourselves and be more conscious about our health. One of the measures we have implemented to address the struggles and challenges was equipping our personnel with face masks, gloves, improvised face shields and alcohol for sanitization. In addition, we also conducted mass testing of all Cotabato City Police Station personnel to ease the mind of our frontliners. Through coordination with the LGU and by encouraging the participation of volunteers, force multipliers and the community, the strict enforcement of community quarantine protocols within the AOR were properly implemented. Inadequacy in the supply of PPEs was later solved through the initiative of Malabon City Police Station in making improvised PPEs, while some were provided by the local government, donors and other Civic-minded people.

Our personnel from Naga City Police Station embraced the situation and found ways to accept the “New Normal Duty Scheme” to the point that even our female personnel ride bicycle just to report to duty everyday. Flexibility at its best! The Valenzuela City Police Station adopted the minimum health standards embodied in DOH-IATF-EID Guidelines as part of our normal practice. Despite being on full alert status, we scheduled the duty of our office personnel and detailed 75% on the ground to augment our Police Community Precincts (PCPs). This allowed us to have skeletal workforce to implement social physical distancing at work. We tailored-fit our offices to comply with social distancing protocols, aside from wearing facemasks, face shields and gloves, to allow our staff to work safely and be able to cope with our higher headquarters. With the help of the LGU, markers as well as transparent barriers for our clients were made possible.

Question 3: What accomplishments have you achieved after implementing your identified initiatives and strategies?

Response of MPD: Our personnel are now more informed about the virus and conscious how not to transmit COVID-19 to their offficemates and their families.

Response of NPD: The accomplishments may not be that concrete in terms of data available, but the PNPh can be contented with the fact that implementing the IATF-EID rules and guidelines has surely saved a lot of people from being infected. At least, we’ve saved hundreds of thousands of lives. We have done our best, and that itself alone gave us confidence that in one way or another we have at least contributed to the betterment of the country.

Response of NPD: The best achievement in our office in implementing these strategies is the cooperation of the public. We were able to maintain a minimum of one thousand people in our workplace in Cagayan Valley Cities. Through our strategies, we were able to do our job right. We accomplished effective way or strategy to protect our personnel as well as to provide protective gear and other necessary materials to our personnel in face of COVID-19. Most of our personnel are healthy and COVID-19-free despite of everyday exposure to the public. More so, after series of police operations, Community Quarantine violators have lessened. Likewise, the Stations were able to control and prevent the further spread of COVID-19; maximize the resources in terms of their capability, and protect their personnel from contracting the pandemic. The implementation of Enhanced Managed Police Operations (EMP0) and Anti-Drug Campaign are proof that our initiatives and strategies are effective. Moreover, the low statistics of infected personnel recorded in VCPs and the possibility of less transmission of the virus to our clients/public is another achievement. In addition, we were able to manage our necessary deployments in the field by deploying headquarters personnel to augment our forces in the Precinct level.

Question 4: As a public official, what realizations have you learned from this crisis? What are your plans and programs in the event that another global crisis will occur in the future?

Response of MPD: This pandemic has brought me to realize that we are not prepared for a pandemic. Even the most powerful countries in the world have succumbed to this unseen enemy. Developed nations are as vulnerable as any poor nation. In fact, more vulnerable, I believe. It also proves that viruses can be more destructive than nuclear weapons and wars.

If I am still around in the event that there will be another global crisis, I will see to it that all the members of my family, my staff and personnel under my command will be crisis-realsnt-oriented. They should be knowledgeable on the how’s and why’s of the crisis that we are facing most importantly, how they can cope even without, or less, assistance from the government.

Response of NPD: I came to realize that each of us must be prepared for all contingencies in life. We were all caught flat-footed with the arrival of the pandemic which made the world at a standstill. The PNPh must stockpile basic safety equipment, or individually by including some allowances for each and include it in regular inspections.

Response of MPD: As a public official and NPD leader; my realization during this health pandemic is to be more focused on ourselves, especially in terms of health, because we are nothing here if we do not take care of ourselves for us to feed our families and to serve the public.

Our plans and programs if another global health crisis will happen in the future are as follows: 1) To have health awareness/health education among personnel to at least remind everyone that “Health is everybody’s concern” in order for us to function properly and execute the daily operational activities as law enforcers within our area of responsibility. Further, this must be included in our Police Information and Continuing Education (PICE); and 2) Availability and readiness of allotted resources, supplies and operating allowances for our men and women who will be fighting for this kind of global health crisis. We should devote ourselves to progress that would eliminate, or at least mitigate, the effect of such global crisis in the future, such as the use of internet, social media platforms and other modern means of educating the people. We should always be prepared and learn to maximize all resources available in order to adapt to the situation. Likewise, as a public official, I have realized the value of our Police Office and their vital role in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another realization is that the PNPh is not the only one fighting this crisis so we have to persuade the community as well as the barangays to do their part. We also realized that there is a need for an implementation plan (IPLAN) or a prepared plan of actions and measures so that there will be quick response and appropriate funds that will enable our law enforcers to fully implement the purpose of such community quarantine and prevent and protect the citizen from global crisis. That life is short, health is wealth, and there’s no one greater than God are important realizations for everyone.

This station will continue to adopt the “New Normal” in the event that this global crisis will occur in the future. Moreover, we will be in harmony with our initiatives, our policing strategies will be tested in hot waters during this pandemic. There’s a lot of lessons worth studying and new theories and strategies to make us more capable in the event of another global crisis in the future.

Our PNP and Medical frontliners are continuously risking their lives for the greater good of our community silently, albeit without any media fanfare. They are in an occupation that poses real danger and hazard since most of them have yet to undergo COVID-19 testing wherein no test is given to those who manifest symptoms of infection. Indeed, they deserve the honor and praise for all their hard work. And we are glad to see that their efforts are not in vain.

Let us not be complacent and let us continue to fight and continue to take care of our law enforcers. The Health Department has constructed a medical facility for police officers and medical frontliners who altogether reflect our people’s compassion and care.
NAPOCNUM-NCR experienced challenges in ensuring health and safety of its personnel amid the global health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. First, a shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) designed to protect the wearer from the spread of the infection. The ongoing coronavirus pandemic exposes the vulnerabilities of supply chains or has broken supply chains across many industries which caused PPE stocks to be insufficient to meet the demands of the public. Second, following the announcement of EOC vehicles were not allowed to travel, with exceptions made for necessary service vehicles for frontliners and workers in vital industries and installations, thus, the lack of transportation was also a challenge. Lastly, a number of our employees have pre-existing conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension and others, who are vulnerable to the aforesaid infection.

With the effects and symptoms of the COVID-19 pandemic have yet to be fully understood, it is already clear that this is a moment that demands coordination of all public, private and non-government institutions to take decisive and innovative action cognizant of the need to strike a balance between the safety and health of the community including, but not limited to, the frontliners or workers providing services to the public.

To address the aforesaid struggles and challenges, NAPOCNUM-NCR undertook the following means/initiatives:

- With the number of COVID-19 cases growing exponentially, NAPOCNUM-NCR had requested and coordinated with some Pharmaceutical companies for the procurement of medical goods, such as face masks and alcohol. As such, all personnel of NAPOCNUM-NCR were provided with face masks/shields, alcohol, soap and disinfectant.
- Issued Guidelines adopting the security, health and safety protocols for the prevention and control of COVID-19 inside the office and its premises;
- Adopted Alternative Work Arrangement. Officials and employees at risk and with pre-existing conditions were allowed to work from home;
- Provided reasonable transportation, housing quarters and even free meals to employees who were detailed as skeleton workforce;
- Conducted daily monitoring/recording of the health conditions of personnel;
- Prohibited mass gatherings/assembly or any other religious activities;
- Maintained social/physical distancing between individuals at all times;
- Installed a wash area wherein clients were required to wash their hands prior to entering the office premises;
- Installed UV light sprayer to regularly disinfect the entrance of buildings to disinfect all clients and employees before they were allowed entry;
- Installed UV light and sprayer to regularly disinfect the office premises and documents being received prior to processing;
- Provided free alcohol for all clients and employees at the guard post and in other conspicuous/strategic areas;
- Posted COVID-19 awareness materials in the NAPOCNUM-NCR premises;
- Limited interaction with other citizens and employees. Likewise, employees were advised to refrain from leaving the office premises during office hours to limit their exposure to possible infection of COVID-19;
- Enhanced the use of online platforms, such as Facebook, Zoom, Google and others, to continuously provide efficient and effective services inclusive of up-to-date information to employees and clients;
- Required certain employees to undergo RT-PCR test charged to the office funds to ensure COVID-free office personnel and environment;
- The continued support of the management and cooperation of employees were the greatest achievements after implementing the initiatives and strategies. The COVID-19 transmission in the office was controlled through complementary approaches by monitoring the health status of individual employees and isolating personnel with simple cold-like symptoms or with close contact with someone suspected of being infected by COVID-19. Moreover, there are sufficient essential supplies and materials needed to keep the employees healthy and safe while at home or at work. It can be said that, at present, the NAPOCNUM-NCR is COVID-free.

Thus, through these undertakings, experiences and challenges, we have come to realize the following:

- The coronavirus pandemic has revealed the strength and goodness of people, especially those who are putting their lives on the line to save others, but it also exposed our vulnerabilities.
- It showcased the value of digital transformation and innovation as well as forced many organizations to speed up the digitization of processes in providing up-to-date information and access to their services.
- It showed how nutrition is important to the body; thus, it has led to the prioritization of physical and psychological health. Employees on the other hand, became more conscious of the type of food they consume every day.
- It taught us that we are not yet fully prepared nor capable to address majority of the challenges brought by the said virus, but it also prepared us on how to enhance our pandemic planning, organizing, coordinating and budgeting considerations to provide a comprehensive response in times of crisis.
- It forced officials and employees to adopt different alternative work arrangements, learn new technologies or online platforms and find different ways to serve clients.
- It reminded us of the “Bayanhan Spirit” (helping each other) which was demonstrated in various projects, acts of kindness and volunteering, such as providing food for our frontline service providers, fundraising activities for organizations and individuals in need of financial assistance due to the impairment caused by COVID-19, and production of protective equipment such as face masks/shields, PPEs and others.

Clearly, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on work, workers and everyday lives of all citizens across all continents. With that, the serious questions of what is coming, when and how the COVID-19 pandemic will end remain unanswered.
Struggles, Adaptation, Accomplishments and Realizations amidst our fight against COVID-19 Pandemic

By: ATTY. ALLAN D. ANCHETA
NAPOLCOM Regional Office No. 1

During the early phase of the year 2020, NAPOLCOM RO1 is smoothly and effectively accomplishing its identified Plans Programs and Activities. However, a press release regarding the new COVID-19 pandemic that came from Wuhan, Hubei Province, China alarmed the whole world. Cases of infection are being reported in a growing number of countries internationally. Come the midpoint of the month of March, the entire Luzon was declared under Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) that limits the movement of people, transportation and businesses. Quarantine guidelines were strictly implemented making it difficult for employees from the government sectors to report for work. For a while, everyone was advised to stay at home in order to be protected and abide by the guidelines of the government.

In order to adapt to the current situation, Regional Office 1 personnel, through the initiatives of its Regional Director, Mr. Monday R. Samson, engaged in the new trend of life – the online platform, such as the project "Online Learning Hub" that caters to the community/Citizens who wants to know anything about the National Police Commission (NAPOLCOM) - from its constitutional mandate as the overseer of the Philippine National Police (PNP) to the services it provides to the public and stakeholders.

Amidst the pandemic, NAPOLCOM RO1 was able to accomplish its goals and objectives through the initiatives of its Regional Director and other officials.

- Launching of Electronic Help and Electronic Announcements Reporting System (e-HEARS) through Zoom and Facebook Live
- Launching of NAPOLCOM RO1 Official Web Page via Zoom and Facebook Live
- Signing of MOA with "Every Ten Web Solutions" for the development of the Regional Office 1 Website
- Launching of Law Enforcement Agent Program (LEAP)
- Live interviews by Commando Radio Ilocos Sur and DWRT Radio Station
- Conduct of COVID-19 Rapid Test for regional personnel
- Conduct of self-monitoring and contact points
- Conduct of Investigation on alleged violation of ECQ protocols in Pagsanjan
- Distribution of 40 pieces face shields to PN personnel of Ilocos Norte PPO
- Distribution of 460 relief packs to Senior Citizens in Brgy. Sevilla, City of San Fernando, La Union and hygiene kits to SK Officers of Brgy. Central East, Bauang La Union relative to "Bayanihan to Heal as One Act".
- Conduct of Participation in various webinars, video conferencing, Zoom meetings and online conferences
- Conduct of self-monitoring of its personnel as well as other PN-related and crime prevention activities

As a public official and NAPOLCOM leader, it is significant to convey that the Incident Command System (ICS), and look at the current situation realistically and proactively. These trying times taught the PNP to adapt to a new normal of remote work and to experience how effective the use of video conferences could be. The PNP now realizes that the use of technology can be of great help in the service of the people and to eventually realize novel organizational opportunities and strengths. Also, this crisis made us realize that work can also be done remotely, and how many people are working, and how much people are working, at least more intensely. It is not this that saying that there is no good thing; it is just that the story needs to be acknowledged and validated. This is important because of the resources, effective utilization of technology and teamwork, our organization is capable of transformation to surpass any global crisis in the future.

NAPOLCOM R2: THRIVING AMIDST THE PANDEMIC

By: DIR. MANUEL L. PONTANAL, MNSA
Regional Director, NAPOLCOM Regional Office No. 2

The COVID-19 outbreak has become a global health crisis that immensely affected the way we live and the way we work.

Despite the circumstances that confront the world, our government utilizes various strategies to respond to the challenges and to mitigate the effects of the pandemic in the country.

The NAPOLCOM Regional Office No. 2 remains steadfast in carrying out its mandate to execute administrative control and operational supervision over the Philippine National Police (PNP). Our mandate remains - only the modality in accomplishing it has to be modified. NAPOLCOM R2 has geared itself to become Resilient and Innovative in fulfilling its mandate, albeit the limitations in delivering its services.

Cayagan Valley is home to five (5) provinces. Clients come from different areas within and even outside the Region where COVID-19 cases are prevalent. Personal dealings with clients is inevitable, but the management ensures that minimum health standards, cleanliness, and regular sanitization are always observed for the safety of the clients and employees. Early interventions by the management were made such as procurement of disinfectants, alcohol, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and thermal scanners.

The foremost requirement of our personnel was the limited number of laptop units and other Information and Communication Technology (ICT) equipment which was even distributed during the Internal Audit Task. Due to lack of allotment released to our Office for capital outlay, we were not able to supplement the available ones. Nonetheless, with the benevolence and initiative of our personnel, we were able to deliver the needs of our clientele and have prepared and submitted required reports on time through internet media platform.

As a NAPOLCOM leader, I realized that there are no exceptions in the delivery of public service even in a pandemic-affected situation or even if we are not able to maintain the usual setup and through the situation and find a balance on continuing service delivery. COVID-19 continues to be an integral part of our lives. We are constantly reminded that the heart of public service bears empathy and compassion.

Struggles, Adaptation, Accomplishments and Realizations amidst our fight against COVID-19 Pandemic

By: DIR. RODOLFO GRANDE SANTOS, JR.
Regional Director, NAPOLCOM Regional Office No. 3

Communication is among the huge challenges of this current pandemic. The implementation of contact tracing, which includes the release of a tracking app that connects to social media accounts and mobile phone lines, schemes have been adopted, such as detailing of some personnel in the office who will not only suffice the recorded contact but will provide assurance to clients who will drop by the office for services. Likewise, some personnel (on a skeleton scheme) report to the office once a week only should a number of persons be assigned to check and ensure that there will be no disruptions in office services which also led to another struggle in ensuring a safe travel for those persons who need to report to office. Thus, the service vehicle was utilized to convey personnel (whose residence is near the office) to and from their residence to office and vice versa.

Protocol was observed, such as wearing of face masks, alcohol disinfection/sanitation and personal hygiene were strictly observed.

To address office concerns which need immediate action, daily viber and text communications were used for consultations and referrals. Whereas one primary responsible, teleconference was made available.

As an initiative, the office has implemented the acceptance of online requests for dsnp, PNPPC, PNPSS, and work orders. This allows for the implementation of enhanced security protocols (authentication of police eligibility, certification of police eligibility, certification of pending non-pending cases, and complaints to name a few). This can be accessed through our Regional Office No. 3 Facebook Page. Payment of fees and release of request documents can also be requested on Mondays and Thursdays at the office. This is to ensure the continuity of public service delivery and, at the same time, to ensure the safety of its personnel by limiting contact executions.

As of date, the Office was able to act on online requests for authentication and certification for police eligibility. Complaint referrals were also processed through electronic mode. Even the number of staff in the office is expected to increase by the week.

Likewise, important data on police deployment and COVID-19 related incidents were also transmitted to the level of consultation with complainants and/or referring offices.

Required monthly and quarterly reports as well as other business requirements were already submitted to the Central Office.

In addition, because of maintenance of open line communication with the Regional Director, the RO3 was also able to donate funds for the procurement of PPEs to police frontliners (IPPC3 Health Service and PNP Health Service in Camp Grande); shielded out from the pockets of its personnel.

As a NAPOLCOM leader, I realized that there are no exceptions in delivery of public service even in a pandemic-affected situation or even if we are not able to maintain the usual setup and through the situation and find a balance on continuing service delivery. COVID-19 continues to be an integral part of our lives. We are constantly reminded that the heart of public service bears empathy and compassion.

The Office has adopted and implemented a Public Service Commitment Order (PSCO) wherein public service delivery even during pandemic. Also, a continuous monitoring of health status of personnel is constantly undertaken for possible extension of the resistance of the personnel.
COVID-related Activities and Accomplishments of Region IV-A

Limited personal interaction between the clients and the regional personnel was one of the struggles encountered by the office during the implementation of the Enhanced Community Quarantine in the region. Personal interaction provides a sense of assurance to clients that their concerns are given proper and immediate attention. Since the implementation of community lockdown in the Luzon area, the regional office has been making full use of other messaging platforms, such as mobile phones and official social media accounts to ensure the safety of both clients and regional personnel. This, in effect, extended the amount of time for our regional personnel to attend to clients' concerns.

Another challenge that we encountered was intermittent network connectivity problem. When it comes to Information and Communication Technology (ICT), it cannot be denied that our country has less to offer in terms of fast network connection. Network connection failures often result in delays in the transmission of information, thereby affecting the timeliness and quality of service provided.

As a public official and NAPOLCOM leader, this global crisis has made me realize that commitment and dedication to work plays a vital role in the successful execution of the Commission's plans and programs. More importantly, knowledge and skills in information technology have become a necessity and are now "musts" within the office and work environment in order to survive and cope with the emerging changes in culture and society.

The proposed plans and programs that we will be implementing in the office are skills and enhancement training seminars focused on utilizing modern software programs and strategies, and inclusion in the regional office's procurement program of high-quality ICT and communication equipment and software programs.

Among the COVID-related activities that Regional Office CALABARZON accomplished for the period March to June 2020 are as follows:

1. The regional top management and selected personnel held a briefing through videoconference for the realignment of OP of CPB for CY 2020 based on the policy issued by the DBM in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Reposted in the NAPOLCOM CALABARZON Official Facebook page the announcements from the NAPOLCOM Central Office regarding the status of PNP Entrance and Non-Examination.

3. Issued a Memorandum dated April 4, 2020 directing the submission of monitoring report every 15 days using the prescribed template developed by the regional Monitoring Section. The Memorandum was disseminated to all PPOs for the reporting of the health conditions of police frontliners, particularly those deployed in checkpoint areas.

4. RD Ravarena coordinated with PROA Regional Director PIGGEN Vicente D. Danao, Jr. to remind all concerned police officials in their respective jurisdictions on the strict implementation of ECQ guidelines and exercise extra caution in dealing with ECQ violators to avoid any untoward incident. Likewise, moral support was conveyed to all members of PNP in the region. RD Ravarena expressed his appreciation and commendation of the PNP for their unwavering dedication to the nation's fight against COVID-19.

5. Atty. Mia Antonette M. Ojuijo, Chief of the Technical Services Division (TSD) engaged the regional Monitoring Section to videoconferencing activities relative to the conduct of Modified Monitoring Activities during the pandemic.

6. Provincial Offices and members of the Regional Investigation Unit (RIU) conducted interview and investigation on reports and complaints received by this office on the alleged irregularities and malpractice committed by members of the PNP relative to the implementation of existing community quarantine guidelines and protocols.

7. On the provision of legal assistance and opinion, and addressing queries from various stakeholders, the regional office served a total of 136 clients comprised of PNP personnel, LCEs, PLEBs, and civilian clients during the period March to June 2020.

8. Clients were regularly updated via the official social media or Facebook page of NAPOLCOM CALABARZON on the status of its operations and availability of government services.

9. Selected personnel also attended the "Webinar on Capturing Transparency in Budgeting and Public Procurement in the time of COVID-19" and "Webinar on Alternative Work Arrangement (AWA), Transitioning to the New Normal".

10. Atty. Quijano likewise attended a Promotion Committee Meeting together with the members of the Promotion Board at PROA on June 11, 2020.

11. Moreover, the regional office donated surgical face masks to PRO-CALABARZON and PROA Regional Health Service. It also donated complete sets of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to the Quzon Memorial Medical Center in Lucena City. The office also facilitated the official turnover of 40 sets of rice donated by the NAPOLCOM Central Office to PRO-CALABARZON and the customized face masks donated by the Brethren of President Emilio Aguinaldo Memorial Lodge (PEAMLO) No. 5, Free and Accepted Mason, IGLOI led by WM Duane Ordizifez to the members of the Kawit Municipal Police Station, Cavite PPO.

12. RD Ravarena also initiated the conduct of visitation and distribution of food assistance to police frontliners assigned at the six (6) established 4ART checkpoints in Laguna.

NAPOLCOM CALABARZON officially resumed office operations and opened its services to walk-in clients on June 1, 2020. Health safety and security protocols have been adopted and are being strictly observed by the regional office personnel, especially while transacting business with their clients. Disinfection of office premises is regularly conducted in response to the government's call of preventing the further spread of COVID-19 infection.

Struggles and Initiatives during ECQ relative to COVID-19 Outbreak

By: ATTY. OWEN G. DE LUJAN
Acting Regional Director, NAPOLCOM Regional Office No. 4B MIMAROPA

The past six (6) months have been an "extra-challenge" to me. As such, two (2) factors were identified that mainly contributed to the struggles we experienced in the regional office – these are mobility and health.

Personal mobility is a major problem especially if you demand attendance in the office. Majority of the employees here take public transport in going to and from the office. Hence, we need to shuttle them everyday just to be present for work. Another concern about mobility is geographical location considering that MIMAROPA Region is composed of island provinces. It is difficult to travel from one province to another due to different health protocols imposed.

Health and physical well being of my employees is my priority. I made sure that the office provides them with a secure and healthy working environment. As part of the health protocols, we supplied them with face masks, face shields, gloves, sanitizers and alcohol for sanitization. We even provided vitamins to boost their immune system. There is even a need for a regular disinfection of the whole office which we do every week. On top of the regular functions of the office, I see to it that these needs are likewise met, especially that we have employees who are senior citizens and immunocompromised.

We support the government's efforts to mitigate, if not contain, the transmission of COVID-19 in the country, the NAPOLCOM MIMAROPA Region made the following initiatives:

- Weekly online video conference/meeting (Zoom app) of all officers and personnel.
- Provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Implementation of safety protocols. Thermal scanning, foot baths, hand wash and sanitation areas were consequently placed inside the office premises in line with the Enhanced Policy on the Entrance and Exit of Personnel, Clients/Visitors of NAPOLCOM MIMAROPA Regional Office and Satellite Offices (Oriental Mindoro and Palawan).
- Use of government issued and personal vehicles for the transportation of employees.
- Suspension of the use of biometrics, instead an employee was designated to record and monitor the attendance.
- Weekly disinfection of the office premises.
- Regular monitoring of COVID-19 cases in our area of responsibility through the Provincial Officers.
- Donation of face masks to PNP personnel assigned at the checkpoints.
Navigating through the COVID-19 Pandemic

The NAPOLCOM Dragon Approach towards the “Better Normal”

By: DIR. JOSEPHMAR B. GIL, MPSA, CESO IV
Regional Director, NAPOLCOM Regional Office No. 5

In the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic, NAPOLCOM Regional Office 5 continues to perform a deliberate balancing act of—on one hand—providing our clientele with the best service they deserve, and—on the other hand—ensuring the safety and well-being of our personnel. As an agency that serves the public, we cannot help but remain cautious, restricting our interaction with our clients and our fellow employees as well.

The new normal: Alternative Working Arrangement (AWA) which basically aims to limit the number of personnel in the workplace during the daily working hours has indeed affected the smooth day-to-day transactions in the office. Hence, to strengthen the connectivity between and among the employees without depending much on physical interactions, we reinforced our present Internet capacity by subscribing to an alternative internet service provider that has faster and more consistent connectivity. This further allows the use of our technological tools to conduct webinars, attend online conferences, establish our online system for the processing of administrative complaints filed against the police, and the design of our proposed online scheduling of appointments for our clientele. Meetings, submissions, and other deliverables are made possible by information and communication technology (ICT) that we are now integrating into our new normal working arrangement. Indeed, our online platforms now allow us to be productive while remotely working from the office.

Aside from adopting an online scheme which is responsive to the current situation, we also consider the office and the personal situation of our employees, we also religiously observe the minimum health protocols being imposed by the Department of Health (DOH) and the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID).

Always taking the side of caution, we strictly regulate the entry of clients and visitors to the office building. As such, we have designated a Waiting Area for visitors and a Cleaning and Processing Area for our walk-in clientele at the regional office grounds. Vendors are prohibited from entering our premises. A Hand Sanitization Station was also installed at the building facade and disinfecting foot baths are placed at the main door. Temperature checks are done on both the employees and clientele/visitors before entry to the building. Everyone is required to wear a facemask and/or face shield. Hand sanitizers and alcohol are provided in strategic areas in our workplace for the use of both our employees and clients. All persons who visit the office are accounted for by asking them to accompany a desired contact tracing form in case tracking becomes necessary.

Considering our 40 strong workforce has been divided into two (2) groups of employees who alternately report to the regional office weekly, all personnel are required to submit their individual Work from Home (WFH) weekly requirements and schedules to ensure that their productivity is sustained and monitored even when working from the confines of their homes. A Daily health check (morning and afternoon) to monitor everyone’s health condition is being done by our HRMS through our Official FB Messenger Group Chat which was created at the onset of the imposition of the community quarantine in the region.

Face-to-face meetings, investigations and briefing by the pre-charge investigators and Summary Hearing Officers were conducted via Zoom or any similar application that all parties agreed to use which eased the delay in the process, and outputs were met.

Provincial Officers gathered concerns in their areas of responsibility and forwarded them to the regional office for immediate action and feedback. The bridge of communication and able representation of the regional office, they assured our clients that we are always ready to assist them anytime.

With the mentioned adjustments and initiatives, we have continually delivered our services to majority of our clients with minimal negative reactions.
Struggles and Realizations during the Pandemic
By KEITHLEY T. COMMENDADOR
NAPOLCOM Regional Office No. 7
The pandemic slowed down what used to be the busy way of life for most people. Before this pandemic, we were too busy about almost anything and everything to realize and appreciate the simple joys in life and the things that truly matter – family, peace of mind, and good health. This public health crisis changed a lot of lives in so many different ways. It took away the laughter and conveniences that we used to enjoy, and made things difficult and complicated in certain ways.

What used to be typical became a lot more challenging and inconvenient. For instance, shopping for the needs of the family and home is no longer an exciting walk in the park given the limited mobility and access to stores, towns, and cities. The future slowly became uncertain, as what we thought was normal now seems like a distant memory. Creating havoc as our battle against this disease continues. Anxiety sets in because of the fear of getting infected or any of the family members getting exposed to the virus.

We struggled with the transition from the usual office work to a Work-from-Home arrangement where we could no longer do the usual lock and load in the office, and the face-to-face interaction with clients and colleagues. These abrupt changes from the usual set-up left many feeling displaced and lost for that sense of fulfillment in knowing that at the end of the day, you accomplished something or made a positive contribution. Some struggled trying to figure out a way to make this arrangement work from attending virtual meetings to getting some work done on the computer instead of walking and calling clients without a child crying, fasting around or throwing tantrums, and worst, getting disconnected. At home, we could only rely on the modern technologies and maximize their use to our advantage so we can still fulfill our duties and responsibilities.

Somehow, our day-to-day struggles are no longer too trivial to be unnoticed. Our daily routine and activities are no longer simple as they were before, commuting to and from work became more tedious because of the limited public vehicles. Border control means one has to change buses twice or thrice in going to and from work.

Life may never be the same again. The pandemic has taken a lot from us. In an instant, we lost jobs, jobs, even opportunities, but we realized that it did not take everything away. On the contrary, it gave back a valuable thing that many of us have taken for granted. It reminded us about truly living life and not just making a life, to enjoy the little things, even the simple things. After all, these are just simple things. Without it, we may not be able to realize the beauty of true happiness. These past months, we managed to slow down and watch life happens as we isolate ourselves from the rest of the community, and we became closer to our family after we spent more time together. No matter how difficult our struggles are, if we fight together, we can always conquer, thrive, and survive.

The purpose of why we are going through such a tough time is not to be trivial and difficulty may not be clear at the moment, but with faith we keep moving forward despite the threats of the virus. After all, the Lord our God is always with us. "No doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful, strive to be happy. Life is too short not to be happy."

Programs and Initiatives undertaken during Community Quarantine

THANK YOU COVID-19 FRONTLINERS PROJECT

Protocols and guidelines on Enhanced and General Community Quarantine have been issued and implemented in the different provinces, cities and municipalities throughout Eastern Visayas. During this period, NAPOLCOM Regional Office No. 7, through the Director, Atty. Johnson G. Reyes, has initiated programs and activities to help mitigate and prevent the spread of the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19). Our personnel have visited some Quarantine Control Points manned by the members of the Philippine National Police where we were able to assess the situation of our police officers, determine their logistical needs, and check their health and physical conditions. During this early stage of this health crisis, the office has implemented one of its programs, the "Thank You COVID-19 Frontliners Project" which was designed to support our police officers who serve at the frontlines.

COVID-19 PREVENTION & MITIGATION PROGRAM

Given the nature of their work and their frequent exposure to a number of people, police officers are at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19. Therefore, the NAPOLCOM Region 8, through the Director, Atty. Johnson G. Reyes, has implemented a program that would help avert the spread of the disease and prevent SARS-CoV-2 transmission to our police officers, especially those deployed at the different Quarantine Control Points. Under the "COVID-19 Prevention & Mitigation Program," our personnel distributed medical supplies, food supplements, face masks, and other essentials to all City and Municipal Police Stations in the Provinces of Samar and Northern Samar on May 8-15, 2020.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PROGRAM

The economic damage brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has become evident as shown by the number of industries and businesses that have closed-down. Owing to their limited capital and resources, the small to medium enterprises in the region were adversely affected. These enterprises were forced to shut down their operations leading to unemployment and loss of income to daily wage workers.

With the desire to extend support to our affected local workers in the region, including NAPOLCOM personnel whose pension benefit was temporarily suspended, all NAPOLCOM Region 8 personnel contributed their personal money and the office was able to raise Php 109,000.00 for the relief operations.

NAPOLCOM RO IX Implements Measures to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19
By LEO GLENN LAGABON
NAPOLCOM Regional Office No. 9
It cannot be denied that the year 2020 brought out the worst and the best in people. The onset of the Corona Virus Disease 19 or COVID-19 in January of this year was met with not much apprehension due to its flu-like symptoms. But as time went on, the global village in which we live in COVID-19 mushroomed into a global pandemic, taking its place alongside other pandemics that changed the course of history, affecting the lives of more than a million people to date, and humbling and crumbling the economies of virtually all nations.

It continues to present an enormous threat that has required unprecedented levels of concerted intervention on a global scale. As the pandemic continues to wreak havoc across our country, including the Zamboanga Peninsula, National Police Regional Office IX, through its Director, Atty. Herminio B. Eloban Jr., has urged every unit to ensure that consultation-based measures compliant with regulatory standards that are designed to set into place a working environment that would ensure the unhindered provision of services to its clientele, while safeguarding both the physical well-being and morale of the employees against COVID-19.

Prior to the resumption of work in May 2020, after a two and a half-months Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), health and safety measures and advisories were posted in the official Facebook page of NAPOLCOM IX and that of the RO IX Regional Office of which they, including information about face-to-face transactions, were posted through social media and were delivered via text messages. Effective May 11, 2020, officers and personnel at the Regional Office and the Satellite Office in Zamboanga City, which is being configured to serve as a virtual second regional office, were being prepared to ensure the safety of both personnel and clients should the latter prefer face-to-face transactions. The Regional Office also developed a protocol for physical distancing of residents of Zamboanga City but are reporting at the Regional Office in Pagadian City have been reorganized to cater to the needs of the City.

To ensure the safety of the regional personnel and the clients, hand washing station and footbath were placed outside the main office entrance and clients were required to fill out a questionnaire about their state of health, whereabouts and close contacts prior to visiting the office. Large and eye-catching notices and health protocol posters were placed in prominent areas. Floor-to-ceiling plastic barriers were also installed to physically separate the regional personnel from the clients. A distance of at least two (2) meters apart was also implemented per working stations while glass barriers were installed on the tablets of the employees.

In order to limit the number of clients inside the office, a canopy was mounted in front of the main entrance to serve as waiting area for other clients. The office equipped all organic, contractual and detailed officers with face masks, face shields, gloves, alcohol, and other necessary personal effects.

To fully enforce proper social distancing, a skeleton workforce scheme was implemented in both the Regional and Satellite Offices in adherence to the Alternative Work Arrangement (AWA) prescribed by the Civil Service Commission (CSC) in its Memorandum Circular No. 10, s. 2020. The Regional Office of NAPOLCOM RO IX is evaluated on a monthly basis, and reviewed as needed, to conform with the existing state of quarantine declaration, protocols and applicable policies of the CSC, DOH and the IATF-EID, and in consideration of the welfare of the employees.

With these measures and by the Grace of God, the skeleton staff of NAPOLCOM RO IX have come down with COVID-19 infection.
COVID-19 Pandemic: The NAPOLCOM Xi’s Struggles, Innovativeness and Realizations

By: DIR. MA. TERESA TUBURAN-PACUADAN, CESO
Regional Director
NAPOLCOM Regional Office No. 11

When the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic reached Philippines shores, nobody, except perhaps a few, realized the extent of the threat posed to public health. Its magnitude and the gravity of its effect to the human race, in general, and to the Filipino people specifically.

As shown in the different news channels and social media, governments from around the globe are in quandary to contain the virus. Police forces, including NAPOLCOM, were deployed to minimize its effects since we have not seen or even heard of the likes of this before. Suddenly, works were disrupted, restaurants closed, movement of people were restricted, mass transportation was halted, and supply chains were shut down, among others.

The NAPOLCOM, of course, is not immune and was not spared from this catastrophe. Admittedly, similar to anyone who was caught in the wake of this pandemic, the Commission is surely dumfounded and even traumatized as the events unfolded.

Undoubtedly, by the Regional Office struggled in finding ways to provide efficient services to its clients without endangering their health and safety as well as the personnel who personally interacted and catered to their needs. Then it was realized that in situation such as this, a common sense approach should remain calm and give preferential attention to the current condition in order to think straight and be more responsive.

It is at this point that innovativeness and ingenuity, two qualities the Filipinos are known for, are needed. Thus, taking advantage of the modern technology, virtual conferences and meetings on zoom and other online platforms were undertaken where everybody was encouraged to share their respective ideas and come up with solutions. NAPOLCOM continuously served the clientele. This resulted in the formulation of an operational plan to provide unhindered delivery of services.

Prior to the implementation of the Community Quarantine and later, Subsequent Community Quarantine in Davao Region, the Regional Office was able to communicate to the general public that the NAPOLCOM will be observing an initiative work arrangement as directed by the central personnel agency of the government and relevant government offices.

At such, clientele was advised to communicate their respective concerns and queries through call and/or text messages, Facebook (FB) Pages and by means of electronic mail (email). A mobile phone, FB account, and email address were maintained specifically for this purpose. The only request of front-line services was to be found in regards to personal identify information only. The police officers who will be leaving the service.

The chiefs of units were instructed to conduct the week-long teleconferencing or any other means of communication to ensure that work assignments are timely and efficiently accomplished and submitted.

As part of the NAPOLCOM’s continuous efforts and initiatives, the regional office provided police officers with the much needed face-masks and face-shields, and distributed the facility of food packs to personnel managing the different checkpoints and control points that are located strategically.

In times of crisis, it was realized that it is extremely essential for a leader to be well-informed to be able to formulate relevant solutions. This is then followed by critical thinking, and to be goal-oriented.

As COVID-19 pandemic puts the entire world reeling and situates us in a new era of uncertainty, it, however, provided us the opportunity to ponder to the course of action to be taken if ever it happens again. Hence we must ensure that at the very least, we stay strong in the future. Otherwise, we are brought to remember ties that remain as the most essential things in life, like our family and friends.

Nonetheless, having been known for our resiliency, we will, surely, get through this pandemic. We remain optimistic that with perseverance, understanding, and the meandoms, let us stick together from a distance.

Challenges, Adaptation and Realization about the Pandemic

With this new normal trend, the regional office must pull in the use of the internet technology as a tool to achieve the mandates and vision of the Commission. With the use of e-communications, we are able to constantly discuss matters regarding issues and concerns and to directly and efficiently deliver services to its clients.

In this life, you may be known for something new, nice, big and awe-inspiring things which enabled us to leap above. One of the important lessons we have learned from this crisis is the importance of technology. Through technology, we were able to connect with each other even virtually, do our work from home, buy our groceries and pay our bills. If this crisis had happened a decade ago, life would have been very miserable and difficult since there would be no Zoom, Facebook or other that would carry us through.

This after crisis, the world will never be the same again. It will be a world different from that we were accustomed to. Thus, there is a need to reassess our role, functions and processes as an agency tasked with supervising the police.
NAPOLCOM-12’s Experience During COVID-19 Pandemic

By: DIR. VERONICA C. HATAGUS, CPA
Acting Regional Director, NAPOLCOM Regional Office No. 12

The start of Calendar Year 2020 offered a lot of promise as we were able to facilitate the holding of a joint executive conference with the leaders of Police Regional Office (PRO) -12 last January 28, 2020 where we have formally agreed to jointly undertake 12 identified programs, projects and activities throughout the year.

We had just jointly conducted the kick-off ceremony of the Women’s Month Celebration on February 3, 2020. We, in fact, even wondered if we would not be spared from within 16 April, 2020 when, all of a sudden after barely three (3) days, the disturbing news about COVID-19 started to spread like wildfire. Metro Manila where our Central Office is located and last but not the least, in the highland of Luzon, was placed under Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) or plain lockdown. The offices at that time rose up exponentially, all Mindanao regions and provinces were also declared under ECQ.

The0 experience of worry and uncertainty engulfed us - we were in a frenzy. What added to our struggles was the absence of any clear directive or guidance from the Central Office on what actions to take and on what activities to undertake.

Keeping our composure, we were forced to come up with decisions by benchmarking on what other government agencies, such as the DOH, if the bill NEDA, were doing. We have “hit and run” some of our employees’ home and at the same time required several others to serve as skeleton workforce in the office.

Few days after, we received a Memorandum about the suspension of some of our programs, activities and projects. We were left discombobulated. We wanted to ask what will be our plan “B” or what will be our other alternative. But no one could provide the answers during that time. And so, we had to abruptly cancel our schedule, set up the filing of examinations and the just coordinated schedules for the conduct of the Inspection and Management Audit in South Cotabato Police Provincial Office and all its subordinate units.

As news of rising transmission of the COVID-19 were circulating all over, it started to sink in our minds how dreadful this situation has become. We were kept at bay and had to watch what would happen in the next few days. Our struggles were compounded due to the fact that most of our personnel are residents of Cotabato City and Cotabato Province - locations that are situated hundreds of kilometers away from Koomz City where our regional office is located. The quarantine checkpoints at the provincial borders would make it very difficult for them to travel and report to the office and then go home again over the weekend to be with their family.

Another problematic situation we confronted during that time was that two (2) of our personnel who handle crucial designations were hospitalized due to other illnesses. We really struggled with coming up with strategic contingency plans.

The ECQ was extended to the whole month of April and even until the middle of May. So we were kept to do our work mainly through electronic communication and digital technology. We were able to receive communications and send out our regular administrative work through electronic mails. We were able to entertain calls and queries through our hotlines and our social media accounts. Our personnel were kept posted through our Facebook Group Chat.

More importantly, even during the ECQ, we were able to do close monitoring of what our police forces in the localities were doing. Because we were directly involved in the capacity development of the Social Media Engagers of the different PNP units in our region, it has become mandatory for them to tap us of their social media posts all the time. Also, because of the relationship that we have established with the leadership of PRO-12, we were kept abreast of all the developments that transpired in all PNP units in the region.

And so, we still were able to deliver our mandate particularly on our usual participation with PNP recruitment during the month of June.

Because of the agreement that we have forged, we find no difficulty in coordinating with the different PNP units in the region and conducting activities during the Police Community Relations Month in July is concerned. In fact, we managed to conduct significant police and community activities where our regional office became notably relevant. One of these was the Signing of Memorandum of Agreement for the Project "Agri/Pusok/SOCCKSARGEN". The project is a 2.5 million peso worth of intervention from the Department of Agriculture consisting of high value crops and livestock to be turned over to the different PNP units in the region for the development of PNIP integrated farms. The yields of these farms will be used for poverty-alleviation activities in vulnerable communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic is really a "Big Game Changer" and the magnitude of changes that it has brought about is unprecedented. Particularly for us who are service-providers, we have realized that there are so many changes that we have to adapt to and had to do in the past, but this time these have been drastically changed.

For it is the time that we need to give more importance to the total health and wellness of our personnel. There should be more support and more programs intended to promote total health and wellness of our personnel. Also, by total health and wellness, we mean physical, mental and emotional. Once in place, excellent performance and productivity would naturally follow. Conversely, we could not expect excellent performance and productivity from our personnel who are wanting in total health and wellness. Amidst the continued threat of the COVID-19 pandemic and other emerging infectious diseases, we should keep our personnel not only safe but more so, healthy and well, thus highly resistant to viral infection.

Second, we have to change the way we communicate and also in the rate of the performance of our employees. The checking of physical attendance in the workplace has been prohibited even before the ECQ. Besides, this system actually does not give justice to the tasks that others have to do. With the Alternative Work Arrangement that is being implemented now, what should be made as basis for the computation of the performance of our employees are the initiatives that we have done and the results that resulted from their initiatives. We should revisit our Personnel’s Duties and Functions and the way they are measured in Human Resource Training and Development.

Third, the COVID-19 pandemic has made us realize that we need to be more conscious of our access and use of digital technology. This is how we should respond to our work this time. Communication through electronic mails and digital platforms, like video conferencing, messaging, and similar closed-door meetings will aid our office running and will enable us to deliver our services to our clientele more efficiently. We have established a state-of-the-art digital technology and now utilize it to ensure that our employees are abreast in their daily work.

Fourth, our department has also equipped our employees with technical knowledge and provide them with the gadgets for digital communication.

Last but not the least, we need to come up with our Risk and Vulnerability Assessment to any emerging crisis that are most likely to confront us in the near future. Based on this, we should have a clear Strategic Action Plan.

This is the New Normal. Things will not return the way they used to be. And it has been said time and again that “We cannot expect to meet the challenges of today with yesterday’s tools and expect to be still in business tomorrow.”

NAPOLCOM BARMM
Struggles, Adaptation, Accomplishments and Realizations

By: ATTY. FAHIMIE M. OTCAL
NAPOLCOM-BarMM Regional Director

The struggle really boils down from not competently knowing at once who is infected and who is not, considering that our Regional Office provides services to the members of the Philippine National Police (PNP) who are frontliners of the ongoing pandemic. However, as Public Officers, we are duty-bound to deliver services to our clients amid the danger of the killer disease. Nonetheless, in order to ensure the safety of our employees and clients, we have put in place certain safety measures given by the National Government, through the IATF-EID and DOH, in being enclosed within the premises of our office.

At first, it was uneasy for us in the Regional Office to wear protective mask and face shield since the workforce are not used to wearing such things during office hours but as the virus is rapidly spreading in the country which can be easily transferred from one person to another, all of our employees are adapting by complying strictly to the wearing of face mask and face shield all the time and constantly disinfecting hands with alcohol and hand sanitizers.

The Regional office came up with office protocol as safety measures for both our clients and personnel. The office maintains social distancing at all times and requires everyone to mandatorily wear face mask. Every Friday afternoon of the week is the disinfection day in our Regional Office.

One of the challenges that this office encountered during this pandemic is that most of the frontline workers or skeleton force during the ECQ/ECQ did not have means of transportation in going to the Regional Office. The Service’s vehicle and Public Service Vehicles (PSV) for government employees only serve in the Regional Office. While doing so, the personnel cannot be fetched all at the same time by reason of social distancing.

More than anything, the Region’s greatest accomplishment is that no one got infected by the COVID-19 amid its continued delivery of service to the PNP Frontliners.

One of our realizations is that the Philippines is not ready for this kind of pandemic. It has exposed our deficiencies in terms of hospital capacities, medical supplies and protective gears, shortage/lack of medical practitioners and funds. Therefore, the government should be allocating more funds and plans to address this global health crisis that taught us that caring, assisting and communicating for a clear cause know no bounds.
The Multifaceted Office Struggle with COVID 19 Pandemic: The Case of NAPOLCOM Cordillera

Contributed by: NAPOLCOM-Cordillera Administrative Region

This regional office, just like any other agencies in the country, was not exempted from the extensive impact of this COVID-19 pandemic, both in our personal and professional lives. The ensuing facts outline the struggles the office had necessarily wrestled and the corresponding insight it had realized.

Initially, most of the major programs, projects and other activities, especially during the 2nd quarter of this cycle year, were discontinued due to the nationwide community quarantine which mandated people to stay at home and offices/businesses to temporarily stop operation in order to mitigate the spread of the virus. Hence, this office launched some innovative programs of the Commission through online technologies and other unconventional and alternative means.

Secondly, stress and anxieties engulfed us as we see the rising number of confirmed positive cases and deaths from COVID-19 nationwide and abroad. More so, the procurement of protective supplies and equipment, such as disinfectants, alcohol, sanitizers, the newly needed thermal scanner and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), especially during the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) was difficult as there were limited stocks and access to suppliers brought about by the temporary closure of industries and businesses.

Thirdly, problems of transmission of reports to the Central Office and other agencies (ISC, DBMA, COA) most especially during the ECQ when movement of personnel was constrained. Some reports could not be completed under the Work-from-Home (WFH) scheme which compelled certain regional staff to personally report to the office.

Fourthly, some personnel who were required to report to the office but do not have private vehicles were constrained to use public utility vehicles. As an automatic response, Dir. Editha S. Paddoc, MNSA, the Regional Director of NAPOLCOM-CAR, mobilized the provision of transportation services for these personnel in going to and from the office and their respective residences.

Lastly, personnel struggled with the limited resources to cope with the WFH scheme, such as internet and computer services. Hence, in order to help ease this problem, the office initiated the provision of monthly load allowances to all personnel.

On the other hand, this pandemic is not an entirely catastrophic event but it also brought valuable lessons when viewed from a brighter perspective. The pandemic furthered the sense of responsibility and belongingness of all personnel to take good care of themselves and make sure they do not contract the virus and endanger the others. It pushed them to be computer savvy as the situation demanded it to be. It deepened the employees’ care and concern for each other and inculcated in them the value of sharing goods and other resources. Also, the situation did not hinder the office to initiate outreach programs to extend help and support specifically to the most affected sectors of the community, like the provision of food and hygiene kits to the visually impaired individuals (i.e., blind and visually impaired), the provision of PPE to PNP frontline workers.

The determination is bigger than the problem. The office initiated various innovative mechanisms, despite of limited time and resources, to protect its clients and employees and continue delivering quality services to its customers and guests; as follows: provision of hand wash area, placing of disinfection mat and warning signs like “No Facemask No Entry” in front of the regional office; renovating the internal structure of the office, such as installing plastic barriers and signage like “Entrance/Exit “Client No Entry” to prevent direct exposure to clients andcope with the new normal trend; and accommodating client’s needs and concerns through online services with the use of the NAPOLCOM Cordillera social media platforms, such as the NAPOLCOM website, FB page and e-mails.

Finally, apart from the visible external battle, we face the unseen internal struggle to deal with new routines as a result of our social isolation, and to cope with stress and anxieties which were peaked by the fear of contracting the coronavirus. We deemed it necessary to find ways to handle not just the common symptoms of the virus but also the invisible effect it brought to our psychological and emotional health. In consideration of the foregoing, it is highly recommended that all personnel should undergo stress and debriefing programs to recuperate and bring them back to their normal state of mental, psychological and emotional well-being prior to this pandemic.

As the world adjusts to a strange and uncertain new normal when the global pandemic COVID-19 reached our local shores, many are grappling with fear for their health and safety. The economy and life itself have been upended. Many face unemployment and the entire population have been separated from colleagues, friends, family, and in many cases, significant others.

As such, frontline workers – medical workers, policemen and volunteers – are in the thick of the battle, disregarding their own safety, to fulfill their sworn oath. Police Officers in particular have sworn to “Serve and Protect” not only the peace and order in the country but also each and every citizen.

But behind every police officer frontline is a wife, a child, a parent, a sibling, a neighbor and a friend who have extra reasons to be worried as their loved ones put their lives on the line. Being a police officer, my husband has voluntarily isolated himself, choosing not to go home for fear that he might inadvertently carry the virus home, infecting our family members and neighbors. He hasn’t been home since the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) has been implemented on March 17, 2020.

Before the lockdown, I was with him as he prepared for his shift. I watched him strap on his bullet proof vest. I heard him check the chamber of his duty weapon. Then he fastened his gear belt and laced his boots, transforming into a warrior prepared for battle before my eyes. My thoughts would sound a bit dramatic to you if you’ve never walked in my shoes, but ask any spouse of a law enforcement officer and she will tell you the same thing. My husband is physically and mentally on duty while wearing the uniform, even before he leaves our home. He is well-trained and prepared for whatever comes his way.

For those of us who are not in the force, we forget the stress and demands that are the daily obligation of every police officer. Unlike those of us whose daily activities are quite predictable, police officers rarely know what each working day would bring. Police work is a profession wherein every day you know that you may have to give up your life to protect others. That is the greatest sacrifice of all. While you are caring for the family and friends in the safety and comfort of your homes, there are men and women who sacrifice time, effort and their very lives in the fulfillment of their jobs and duties to give you normalcy.

Being married to a police officer is different from being married to an average Joe. It is a responsibility, a burden, an honor and a blessing. It is often thankless and throws up many challenges. But it also has its rewards. I often think that it is both of us who are in the police force, not just him.

This is the life we chose. It’s a life filled with purpose, selflessness and humanity. Not all cops and officers are evil. Not all cops are corrupt. My husband is a police officer who is out there doing his job, providing for his family, all the while doing his best to keep his promise to come home to me at the end of his shift. As a police officer’s wife, I live with the reality every day of the deprivations that he can’t keep his promise. I carry that burden in secret, as fiercely support him while he performs his duty amidst dealing with my own anxiety and feelings of uncertainty in these trying moments.

This is what most families of every police officer experience and contend with – we are in a constant state of fear and helplessness. And it is definitely not for the faint of heart. We try our best not to be consumed by it since worrying robs you of happiness, and it is a futile emotion. We often remind ourselves that Police Officers are the training ground for the future leaders and the tools to come home alive. When they get called out to god-awful jobs, such as this time, they need to know that they can rely on us in helping them through it. And that we aren’t just at home worried sick and falling apart. We need to have their backs, be their rock.

Prayers are pretty much the only thing that will get us through most shifts and through these hard times. Constant communication is also a key, especially if you’re away from each other. Providing a consistent emotional support even when you aren’t physically together is a key.

Love, support, encouragement and understanding are indeed the strongest than food. For those of us who feel that things pain an unexpectedly bright portrait of these dark times, embrace the enduring spirit of the ties that bind, and serve as a reminder to us of what’s truly important.
Late 2019 when an unknown pneumonia virus reportedly hit Wuhan, Hubei Province of China; dawning the headlines on every news outlet all over the world by 2020. Conspicuously, Wuhan was under the microscopic mockery and observation of every nation. Containment of the virus became impossible with the alarming level of spread and severity of inaction, which resulted in the World Health Organization's announcement of COVID-19 pandemic.

The whole world witnessed millions of people falling ill and mortality increasing by hundreds of thousands. With COVID-19 vaccines still in formulation and research, growing fear of the unknown greatly transformed our daily lives. The war against the virus dramatically defined the new normal way of life. With the stern and restrictive protocols set, human existence has turned 180 degrees to fit in.

For more than two months from March 17 to May 31, 2020, the Philippines was in a standstill as the whole island of Luzon was placed under an Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). EDSA and other streets were deserted after authorities implemented strict quarantine procedures. Extensive travel restrictions were in place. The normally bustling malls, pubs, bars and theaters were temporarily closed. People were compelled to stay in their homes. Worldwide, flights were cancelled or turning around in mid-air, as the aviation and tourism industries stopped operation.

Drastic measures aimed at monitoring the spread of COVID-19 and reducing the mortality rate were taken. As the transportation halted and businesses and other industries closed, the abrupt change led to unprecedented events. The underlying threat to humanity brought about by COVID-19 has, ironically, provided momentary impact and improvement in our existence.

**ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS**

While real-time updates on the battle against COVID-19 has focused largely on coverages on the statistical data of suffering, death and economic disaster, some also expressed the pandemic's silver lining for the environment.

Air pollution has been a global perennial problem. Just before the lockdown, the World Health Organization (WHO) released a study in May 2018 stating that the Philippines has about 45.3 deaths per 100,000 individuals due to outdoor air pollution, ranking our country with the 3rd highest mortality rate following China at 81.5 deaths and Mongolia at 48.8.

For two consecutive years, IQAir AirVisual, an app and website providing a centralized platform for real-time global and hyper-local air quality information, also listed the Philippines among the World's Most Polluted Countries in 2018 at 48th over 78 countries, and 57th over 98 in 2019.

However, after a week of shutting down of economic activities due to the ECQ, pictures of clearer and bluer skies have been circulating through the various social media platforms. Citizens snapped smog-free skyline with a view of the impeccable Sierra Madre mountain range. Viral "before and during" lockdown photo comparisons showed a big difference in the Metro with the restricted mobility of the public and fewer cars on the road.

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Undersecretary Benny Antiporda said that the decreased pollution and carbon emissions have significantly improved the air quality in Metro Manila by an average of at least 50% drop in air pollution.

Aside from Zoom Happy Hour, Tiktok videos and rants on the distribution of government relief goods, netizens also discovered another captivating post of Manila Bay's clear turquoise colored water. It seems to be one of our stunning beaches in Boracay or Palawan.

**PERSONAL CARE**

With experts bombarding citizens information on staying healthy, being healthy does not connote physical attributes but the whole lifestyle attached to it. Social distancing, wearing of mask and carrying of sanitizer or alcohol became basic must-haves. Broadened awareness on personal hygiene, such as hand washing, covering sneezes or coughs, and disinfection, which should be mandatory, has gone a long way and has become a priority.

Suspension of classes and flexible work hours provided individuals more time to assess oneself in isolation. It is tough and the creeping feeling of remoteness is not that fun, but exploring self-development might be our solace. The usual antidote to lethargy, such as Netflix or TV bingeing, might buy a few hours or a solid week but will definitely vary you out.

Naturally, we tend to find worthy activities to devote our time. Some yielded to the idea of accomplishing hobbies you never have time to do, such as baking, quilting or any crafting ideas. Others share their fitness journey through live broadcasts and sessions that equate with giving better solutions to boredom by adding physical inspiration and transformation. Whatever actions we encounter, we discover the multi-faceted and dynamic human within ourselves that our job titles, accomplishments or businesses will never define.

Too often, we get caught up in maintaining fast-paced lifestyles and tend to neglect personal affairs – most frontline workers do not have. Familial values are often shadowed with commitments, meetings and other responsibilities disregarding its holistic substance. In the war against COVID-19, the opportunity to build or rebuild the human connections, slowing down and dedicating our time to what is important might lead to nourishing relationships. With the emotional, financial and physical distress we are all experiencing, going back on our roots and our family are the best support system we can have in these challenging times. Through worthy conversations and fun activities, people patch up strained relationships and continuously develop high regard to our core values.

The devastation brought about by this pandemic has taught us to stay grounded, appreciate the simplest things, respect everyone, discipline ourselves, and be grateful to whatever blessing we receive. Regardless of social stature, race, political belief or religion, little by little we have been coping with this drastic change and adapting well to the new normal way of life.

As we continue our battle against this unknown disease, we also move forward gradually and, surely, one day we can call ourselves survivors. An open mindset and strong will would definitely bring us inner peace and a deeper sense of awareness to accept change. As Greek Philosopher Heraclitus said, "The only constant in life is change."