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Newborn Screening in Batanes: TRANSCENDING BARRIERS OF DISTANCE

By Dr. Richard Ong, MO III, NBS Coordinator



Mula Batanes hanggang Jolo, as the Eat Bulaga song goes, we are at the northern most province of the Philippines. Nestled amidst mountainous slopes and pristine, the breath taking panoramic view of unadulterated island bounded by the South China Sea continues to capti-

mate every visitor that sets foot at Batanes province. This province is closer to Taiwan than the busy metropolis of Manila.

It is no wonder that this small but terrific island has transcended barriers of distance to emerge as one of the best practices in the implementation of the newborn screening program. Sometime in 2006, Batanes unprecedented success at NBS adoption continues to mesmerized local program implementers. The willingness and the com-

True to the cliché, that if there is a will, there certainly is a way. Geographic distance shall never before become a stumbling rock to NBS adoption process.

mitment were there but no courier was available in the area. Only one airline flies from Manila to Batanes, and the cost of sending the ample through them is very expensive. Desperate over how to send the newborn screening samples to the laboratory, the Batanes General Hospital NBS team composed of the then NBS Coordinator Dr. De Los Reyes, her successor, Dr. Richard Ong, and the hospital administrative officers, met with the Center for Health Development Metro Manila (CHD-MM). They discussed this pressing concern, in as much as there are no regular flights to the island. CHD-MM sought the assistance of the Newborn Screening Reference Center (NSRC) and soon enough NSRC was negotiating with the owner of CHEMTRAD Capt. Mario Barradas. CHEMTRAD flies regularly from Batanes to Tuguegarao. CHEMTRAD agreed to bring the samples to

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Philhealth rolls out Newborn Screening Package

P500 allotted to Newborn Screening

The inclusion of Newborn Screening as one of the Philhealth benefits has finally been realized.

The Philippines Health Insurance Corporation (Philhealth) approved and released Circular No. 34, s - 2004 on December 2006 which provides the guidelines on the implementation of the Philhealth Newborn Care Package (NCP) for accredited institutional and professional health

care providers and members of the national health insurance program.

The NCP package includes the necessary newborn services - umbilical cord care, eye prophylaxis, Vitamin K, Thermal Care, First Dose of Hepatitis B immunization and Newborn Screening.

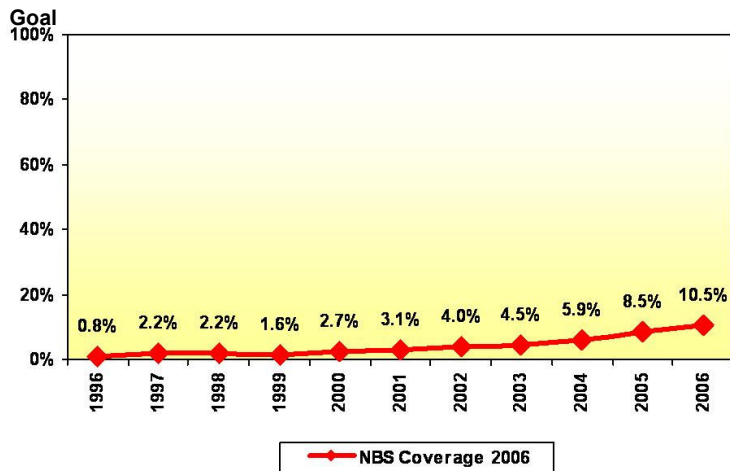
The amount of the NCP Package is Php 1000. Of the Php 1000, Php 500 is allotted to newborn screening. The Phil-

health member will only pay an additional P50 for the screen and another P50 for collection of samples. The NCP package does not allow claims for partial provision of services. All the services included in the NCP must be administered to the newborn.

Please see complete guideline of the Circular No 34, s-2006 on page 2.

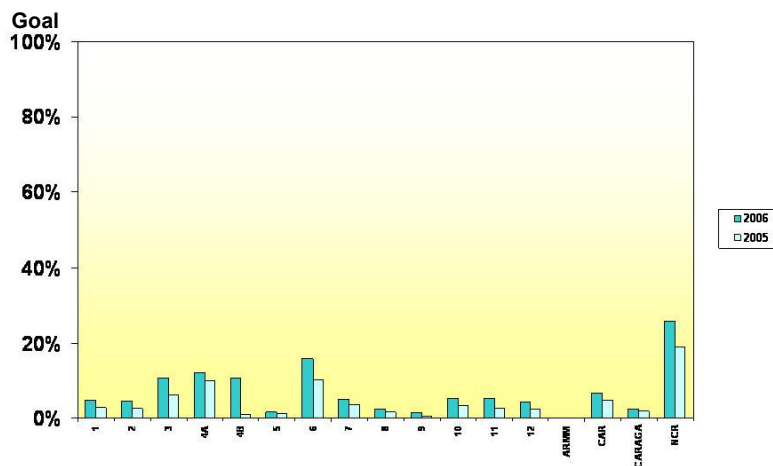


2006 NBS UPDATE



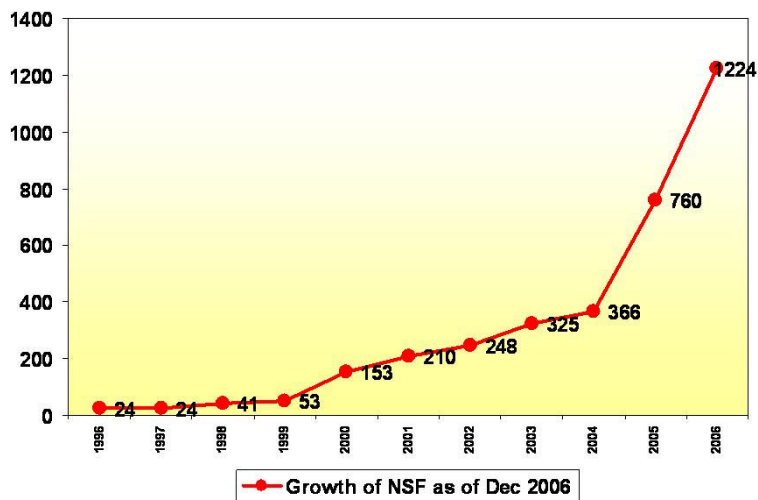
*NBS Coverage based on estimated 1.7M babies born every year

PHILHEALTH RESOLUTION CLIP HERE



NBS Regional Performance 2006

* Regional Performance based on number of births per region



*Hospitals, Birthing Homes, Rural Health Centers offering newborn screening services





PLAN sponsors NBS Training for Masbate

Plan International-Masbate Central Program Unit in partnership with Center for Health Development Bicol and the Newborn Screening Reference Center conducted training on Newborn Screening last February 22 - 23, 2007 at the Masbate Provincial Hospital. The training was attended by medical personnel of some selected government hospitals from the Province of Masbate.

The participants were trained on the basic concepts of Newborn Screening, implementation procedures as it applies to the local government unit and how to do the heel prick method. The participants also had the experience of explaining to the parents the nature and benefit of newborn screening.

PLAN, the sponsor of the training, is an international, humanitarian, child-centered development organization without religious, political or government affiliations.

NTWG on NBS meets

Last January 9, 2007 the Newborn Screening National Technical Working Group (NTWG) convened the first of its quarterly meetings for the year at the National Institutes of Health.

The group reviewed and discussed the Philhealth Board Resolution No. 925 which provides the guidelines on the the Philhealth Newborn Care Package (NCP) which includes newborn screening test; training grants being made available for specialists - pediatric endocrinologists, clinical geneticists, and genetic counselors; and, matters for inclusion in the agenda of the ACNBS meeting.

Present during the meeting were Dr. Juanita Basilio of DOH-National Center for Disease Prevention and Control (NCDPC), Dr. Carmencita Padilla (NIH-NSRC), Dr. Melinda Atienza (Philippine Society of Pediatric Metabolism and Endocrinology), and representatives from Philhealth, DOH-National Center for Health Promotions, Center for Health Development -Metro Manila, DOH-Health Policy Development and Planning Bureau, DOH-NCDPC, DOH-National Center Health Facility Development, DOH-Bureau of Health Facility Services, and Newborn Screening Reference Center (NSRC).



Dr. Francisco T. Duque III receiving a plaque of appreciation from Dr. Carmencita D. Padilla and Dr. Rowena Pua of the Newborn Screening Society of the Philippines (NSSPI) during the NBS Convention held at The Philippine Plaza Hotel on October 6, 2006.

Fellowship Grants Now Open for Specialists

The Newborn Screening Reference Center (NSRC) in cooperation with the Philippines General Hospital Department of Pediatric has recently opened fellowship grants for Clinical Geneticists and Pediatric Endocrinologists. This is to ensure the availability of qualified health personnel who can be tapped in the follow-up treatment, monitoring and management of newborn babies screened positive.

Currently there is a gap in the number of specialist vis-à-vis the number of newborn screening patients in the different parts of the country.

These specialists are currently doing co-management of positively screened

with the babies' physicians. Fellowship grants for genetic counselors will soon be offered.

The fellowship grant is pursuant to Republic Act 9288 or Newborn Screening Act of 2004 which states that the National Comprehensive Newborn Screening System (NCNBSS) should work towards the establishment and maintenance of a system of recall, follow-up treatment and monitoring for the prompt and proper management of newborn babies screened positive for the five panel of disorders.

For inquiry, you may call NSRC at (02) 5224396 and look for Riza Suarez.

Advisory Committee on NBS convened

The Advisory Committee on Newborn Screening (ACNBS), the Committee created to act as an advisory body to the office of the Secretary of the DOH in terms of policy and program directions, met last January 17, 2007 at DOH.

Present during the meeting were Dr. Lulu C. Bravo, NIH - Executive Director; Ms. Patricia Mines-Gomez, President of the Integrated Midwives Association of the Philippines Inc. (IMAP); Mr. John M. Castañeda, Undersecretary and Ms. Clemen C. Festin, representing Asec. Panadero of the DILG; Ms. Lina L. Laigo, Executive Director of the CWC; Dr. Carmencita D. Padilla, Director of the NSRC, Dr. Virgilio Castro, representing Dr. Rogelio P. Mendiola, President of the Philippine Obstetric and Gynecological Society; Yolanda E. Oliveros, Director of the National Center for Disease Prevention

and Control, representing Sec. Francisco T. Duque of the DOH.

Discussed were issues and concerns on the implementation and the Progress Report on the Newborn Screening Program to the members including national and regional screening coverage, Performance of Newborn Screening Centers (NSCs), PhilHealth Newborn Care Package and the program targets set for 2007.

Cited targets for the year were: advocacy through television and radio commercials, inclusion of the Newborn screening in DOH's *Garantisadong Pambata*, provision of grants for the training of pediatric endocrinologists, clinical geneticists and clinical geneticists, provision of training and IEC Materials for 10 priority provinces and 5 least performing regions, and the empowerment of the CHD in the implementation of the program.

BEYOND COMMITMENT: A DECADE OF SAVING LIVES

NBS Celebrates Newborn Screening Week

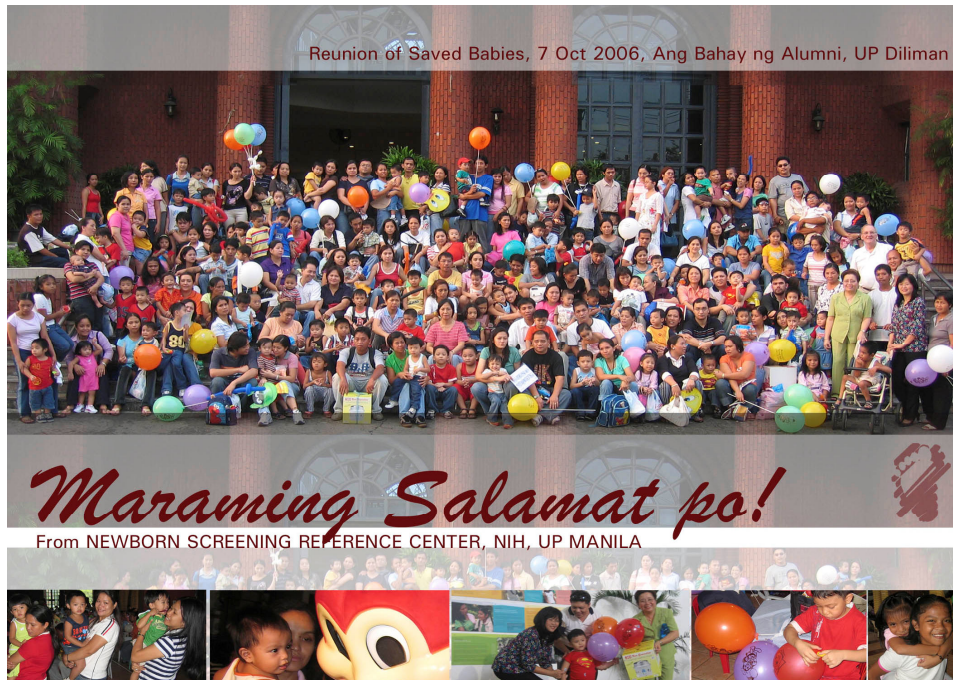
Newborn Screening Convention

In celebration of the Newborn Screening Awareness Week and the 10th year of newborn screening in the Philippines, Newborn Screening Convention was held on October 6, 2006 entitled "Beyond Commitment: A Decade of Saving Lives" at the Philippine Plaza Hotel.

The convention was spearheaded by the Newborn Screening Society of the Philippines, Inc. (NSSPI). The event highlighted the various updates on Newborn Screening in the country and in Asia and best practices in implementing NBS in the local governments, among others. Eight hundred eighty (880) NBS Coordinators, medical practitioners and local government representatives attended the convention.

Reunion of Saved Babies

A Reunion of Saved Babies was held the next day, 7 October 2006 at the Ang



Bahay ng Alumni, UP Diliman as part of the celebration. The reunion was the week's culminating activity. Ninety-six (96) children saved by newborn screening and their parents attended the re-

union. Children were treated to various fun and games.

The said activity also aimed to gain parents' active support and participation in NBS advocacy projects.

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Tuguegarao airport for free. However, the first phase of the implementation was not at all blissful. Due to some miscommunication of who-calls-whom-first, samples were not picked up promptly from the airport. By the time it arrived at the laboratory, they were already considered late for testing.

Soon after, repeat collection cases challenged my wits and candor to the fullest. Many would be able to relate with my experience that it is simply no big joke explaining to parents that the baby needs to be pricked again. As a parent myself, I had to practice empathy in

sounding off the not so good but capable of cure news. Dispelling the discomfort to the concerned party was one rewarding experience I choose to treasure as a newborn screening coordinator.

However, pro-activity and clear communication with the courier solved the problem. No more late samples. One of the most peculiar but efficient delivery innovation system conceived for NBS practice, Working beyond set limitations, it took only a phone call away to request DHL Tuguegarao to pick up the samples at the CHEMTRAD office in Tuguegarao Airport.

Sheer compassion and unwavering dedication drove the active program implementers in Batanes to leaps and bounds in attainment of screens. We are happy to announce that Batanes is almost a hundred percent in our newborn screening of babies delivered in our hospital. With the continued education of our soon-to-be mothers during their prenatal visits, we are sure of its continued success and sustainability. We are also trying to improve our sending of samples by hooking-up with a commercial mail courier which recently opened their branch here at Basco, Batanes.