

"Goiter...and Beyond": Philippines celebrates Goiter Awareness Week

Theo San Luis IGN National Coordinator for the Philippines



"Goiter...and Beyond" was the slogan and message of the keynote address delivered on January 29 to culminate the events of the 10th Goiter Awareness Week (GAW) held in Dapitan City in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte (ZdN) in Region 9 in Mindanao, Southern Philippines. According to the 2013 National Nutrition Survey conducted in school-age children, Region 9 is the only geographical area that remains iodine deficient. The Region's median urinary iodine concentration (UIC) of 68 $\mu\text{g/L}$ is also the lowest among the country's 17 regions, while the national median UIC is currently adequate, at 168 $\mu\text{g/L}$, up from 132 $\mu\text{g/L}$ in 2008. The Goiter Awareness Week is observed each year in the 4th week of January following a Presidential Proclamation in 2006. This year's GAW was the second time the activities were held in Mindanao to highlight the problem of iodine deficiency on the country's second largest island.

The observance of GAW in Mindanao reflects the determination of the Department of Health to eliminate iodine deficiency before the next NNS is scheduled to take place in 2018 (the national surveys are performed every five years). In addition to iodine deficiency in school-age children, the 2013 NNS reported insufficient iodine intakes in pregnant and breastfeeding women across Region 9 and the neighboring Region 10, as evidenced by the median UICs of 51 $\mu\text{g/L}$ and 64 $\mu\text{g/L}$ in pregnant women and 48 $\mu\text{g/L}$ and 53

$\mu\text{g/L}$ in women who were breastfeeding (in Region 9 and 10, respectively). Since 2013, ICCIDD Philippines (now IGN Philippines) has been assisting provincial, city, and municipal government units in conducting awareness campaigns through lay fora among pregnant and lactating women, briefings among DOH field personnel, and advocacy meetings with local chief executives.



Dr Theo San Luis, the national coordinator of the IGN Philippines, at the closing events of the 10th Goiter Awareness Week in Dapitan City, Philippines.

In August–September 2015, the IGN National Coordinator Theo San Luis, and ZdN Provincial Health Officer Eduardo Luayon carried out meticulous and extensive screening of women from every municipality in ZdN to test for goiter and analyze the iodine content in household salt using RTKs and WYD checkers. A prior study of household salt conducted by GAIN had shown that, in Region 9, as many as 82% of household salt samples were poorly iodized (at 0–5 parts per million), and only 1.2% of samples were adequately iodized (at 40 ppm). The screening events, held at schools, town halls, and village health cen-

ters, attracted large numbers of residents. Many women were diagnosed with thyroid nodules, and those with very large goiters were scheduled to have them surgically removed. A surgical program exists at the ZdN Medical Center, which is a designated referral center for thyroid surgery, allowing it to treat at least 6 patients a day all year round.

The key message of "Goiter...and Beyond" emphasizes that IDD is a spectrum of disorders. And although goiter is the most evident manifestation of IDD, its effects on brain development in infants and children have been stressed in audio-visual presentations, radio and TV interviews, and printed materials developed for public consumption. The Goiter Awareness Week has a memorable slogan in Tagalog: "Goiter Sugpuin, Isip Patalinuhin, Iodized Salt Gamitin," translated as "Goiter Prevention, Intellectual Enhancement, and Iodized Salt Use." The slogan can be seen on tarpaulins and banners displayed in public places and distributed on leaflets and as colorful fans useful in the tropical Philippines. An advertorial to mark the 20th anniversary of the ASIN Law (Republic Act 8172 mandating the use of iodized salt for human and animal consumption) was published by the National Nutrition Council last December to highlight the role of the national salt iodization program in eliminating IDD.

The Dapitan City meeting was preceded by the 31st Annual Convention of the Philippine Thyroid Association on January 23 in Manila, featuring two lectures to clinical topics given by Dr. Hossein Gharib of the American Thyroid Association and a talk on "IDD and the terror it creates" by Theo San Luis from the IGN Philippines. Additionally, PTA and Merck sponsored a workshop devoted to thyroid disease on January 28 in Dipolog City, the capital of Zamboanga del Norte. The workshop was attended by city and municipal health officers, private medical practitioners, trainees, and other health care providers.