



Registered association for the promotion
of medical care and social support in
Northern Samar, Philippines

Bugko, April 2021

Dear members, dear friends, and supporters of Mabuhay!

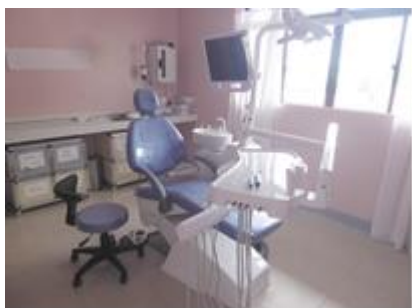
In December, I celebrated Christmas without my family for the first time. It was quite sad, as Christmas is celebrated very differently here, especially less festively. The church was beautifully decorated, but inside the houses, it was almost as usual. The New Year was similar. Since, as in Germany, fireworks and gatherings were prohibited, we also stayed home. Added to that was the news that, due to the virus mutation in England, all flights from the affected countries to the Philippines were suspended. This also included return flights from Germany. So, I'm really still stuck here. The first vaccinations began in Germany on December 27th, but, as I heard, they were also quite slow. At that time, there was no vaccination here yet, and all they talked about was a vaccine from China, which was said to be only 50% effective.

We've had more patients again since the beginning of the year. This is because the government here in our province is allowing people to go for check-ups outside of their local health centers, and as a result, our patient numbers have increased dramatically. Patient admissions are subject to strict hygiene regulations, and disinfection is carried out regularly. Maintaining social distancing is very difficult because it goes against the nature of Filipinos, and we have to constantly remind people that it is necessary to contain the virus. Disinfectant dispensers are available at various points in the clinic. Unfortunately, many patients are now so ill that any help comes too late. This is the negative effect of the lockdown that has lasted over a year. We are seeing a particularly high number of patients with advanced tumors, diabetes, and tuberculosis.





The good news at the beginning of the year was that we were able to purchase and install a new dental unit and a new sterilizer (autoclave) with the help of the Rotary Club of Bonn. It's a real win, as it incorporates the latest technology. We had hoped that the first dentists would be able to work on it in February, but the global situation hasn't allowed it until now. To date, there are no visas for the Philippines, and foreigners are still not allowed to enter. We hope that it will be possible again sometime this year, and that dentists will come to us. The need and demand for dental treatment is huge, and we are now well prepared. Occasionally, I even have to use forceps and pull teeth to help patients. It's good that I've been able to observe so often over the years, so minor problems can be addressed. In Catarman, prices remain very high, so patients avoid dentists there because they don't have the money for treatment.



At the same time, doctors from the US also canceled, meaning that outpatient surgeries have been suspended for the time being after 14 years. They were able to send their supplies, but all surgeries have been postponed until spring 2022. Let's hope they can come then.

On February 21, Typhoon Auring (international name Dujan), the first typhoon of the year, hit us. Thankfully, there was no major damage to the buildings. Large areas were flooded and a large portion of the rice crops were washed away, which had catastrophic consequences for the farmers, but no evacuations took place. Even in the village, the roofs of the very simple huts largely held up. As always, we helped where needed.

As every year, we also had a "soup kitchen" at the clinic. This is a recurring event and brings joy not only to the patients but also to the children and the people who simply drop by. Because many people no longer have jobs, there is often not enough food for everyone in the families, especially since the harvest was damaged by the typhoon, as already mentioned.



We have almost 100 children in our nutrition program. They are divided into seven groups. The children remain our primary concern. The parents are very grateful that we can continue the program, as unemployment has also caused shortages here. Many are only day laborers and don't know if they will have work the next day. Through this program, the children receive a hot meal once a day and receive regular visits. If they are sick, they are treated in the clinic. We have had this program for years, but it has never been more necessary than now during the pandemic.



Our boxes arrived in mid-February. The Meyer family had once again packed their donations in kind and sent them on their long journey. The boxes arrive in excellent condition, the boxes are so well sealed. Packing involves a lot of work to make the best use of the space. The journey for the boxes to reach us in Bugko takes almost three months. Currently, due to the pandemic, it's even longer. We always find buyers for the empty boxes, as they are often used as sleeping pads or for storing clothes. The ordinary people here don't have mattresses or wardrobes. More boxes are currently on their way here to the clinic.



Thank you to everyone who has donated medications, medical aids such as walking sticks, glasses, etc., as well as clothing, shoes, and toys. Everything helps and will be distributed where it is most needed right now.





On February 28, the announced vaccine from China arrived in Manila. The 600,000 doses will be distributed first to doctors, nurses, and the military in Manila. Four days later, 525,600 doses of AstraZeneca also arrived in Manila. This is a drop in the ocean, as at least 70 million people in the Philippines need to be vaccinated to achieve a certain level of immunity. It will therefore take some time until this immunity is achieved, as the vaccination program here is also getting off to a very slow start. Furthermore, the government is not yet willing to allow large companies, for example, to administer the vaccine themselves. Another problem here is politics, and so those working on the front lines are not always vaccinated first. We in Mabuhay have also registered our volunteers, but by the time you receive this letter, none of us have been vaccinated yet, and this is when we are currently seeing almost 100 patients a day from across the province. Unfortunately, testing is virtually nonexistent, so hardly any residents here are known to have tested positive. So every day carries a high risk, and we're happy and grateful that everyone has stayed healthy so far. At the beginning of March, we received more good news. We received confirmation from the German Dental Aid Organization, via Dr. Klaus Winter, that we would be provided with a larger generator. Our old generator doesn't have enough capacity to supply the entire clinic at full capacity. We are very grateful to Dr. Winter for supporting us in this endeavor, as our province is once again and increasingly hit by numerous power outages that can last for hours or even several days. The German Dental Aid Organization has been at our side for years and supports us whenever we need help. Unfortunately, the delivery was only delayed because Manila and neighboring regions went into another complete lockdown on March 29. Due to the new variants, which of course also crossed the Philippine border, the number of infections rose dramatically. In April, there were up to 15,310 new infections in one day, 167,279 infected nationwide, and 382 corona deaths in one day. These were the highest figures ever recorded, even after more than a year of corona, and after a one-year lockdown in the Philippines. No one expected this, as the regulations were very strict all year. We're using the waiting time to build the new generator house so the new generator can move in at any time.



We needed a new diagnostic device for thyroid testing in our laboratory, as reagents for our old device were almost impossible to obtain. This was also due to the pandemic, as the reagents are being imported from outside the country. We see patients with thyroid disorders almost daily, so this was a priority to be able to administer targeted medications to these patients.



There's one problem we haven't been able to solve yet, and that's repairing our X-ray machine. We can't find a technician, and everyone we've consulted so far has said it's very difficult and would be better if it were replaced. We urgently need it, as many of our patients come in with respiratory illnesses, requiring rapid diagnosis. Tuberculosis is still one of the biggest problems in the Philippines, and it's always very time-consuming to send patients to the city for X-rays, as it's very expensive there and valuable time is lost.

We've had exciting and not always easy months behind us, as you can see from the length of this report. Many problems had to be addressed, and so I thank you for your diverse help and for remembering us here. We're also thinking of you and following the developments of the coronavirus situation in Germany in the news.

Wishing you all good health, I send you my warmest greetings.

Yours,

Sabine Korth

Salamat (thank you) from Bugko!

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