



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

Bugko, August 2020

Dear members, dear friends, and supporters of Mabuhay!

Since April, just like yours, Northern Samar and the Philippines have been dominated by the coronavirus. The restrictions on the population have been severe. In our province, people over 60 and under 18 are still only allowed to leave their villages to a limited extent. For trips outside the city, you need a four-page pass issued by the village chief, the mayor, the police, and a doctor, all of whom must confirm that you are not a virus carrier or sick. Only pharmacies and supermarkets were allowed to open. Schools are closed. Only in June did some businesses reopen, and local public transportation was also available again, but with limited passenger capacity, which meant that transportation costs for our out-of-town patients rose. Domestic flights were not available again until mid-July, but they were not regular, and there were repeated flight cancellations. Upon arrival in Manila or even returning home, you have to quarantine for 14-21 days. This makes you think twice about leaving your location, as home quarantine is not permitted here. So you have to go to a government quarantine center, and they're not really welcoming here in the province.

Many people became unemployed. The government tried to alleviate the emergency by providing food and financial aid packages, but the need is still great. Since June, people who previously worked in Manila have been sent back to the province, where they all have to go into quarantine. The problem remains, because they have no work here in the province either, which is why they went to Manila in the first place. So in mid-April we started packing aid packages and our target was the seniors in Bugko, as they are a high-risk group and are under strict quarantine. This time we packed noodles, biscuits, coffee, rice and, for the first time, vegetables and a chicken. Plus soap and toothpaste. As always, we brought the aid directly to the people and there was great joy, as the previous aid via the government mainly contained canned goods. With vegetables and chicken we took a new approach.



Unfortunately, our dentists also had to cancel appointments for April, May, and August because, as already mentioned, there was and is no transport to the island. In addition, there is an international travel ban. No one from EU countries is currently allowed to enter the country. Many patients asked about the dentists, as all the dentists in the city were closed, and only emergencies were being treated at the dental clinic in the hospital. The Philippine Dental Association has issued very strict regulations for dentists during the coronavirus pandemic. For example, they are only allowed to work in full protective clothing and are only allowed to treat a limited number of patients due to hygiene regulations. They must plan long breaks between patients, and these are just some of the regulations.

The clinic is open 24/7, and our volunteers are doing their work without fear, but with protective measures such as face masks and gloves. Alcohol is used for hand sanitization and chairs, patient beds, work surfaces, etc. are regularly disinfected. Patients must also maintain social distancing, and only a limited number of patients are allowed in the clinic building at any one time. Due to the many restrictions, as already mentioned, we have fewer patients at the moment, but we are happy to be able to help them, either medically or with dentures, to name just a few examples.





At the same time, we're also using the time to finally rebuild some of the huts destroyed by Typhoon Tisoy and Typhoon Ursula (both in December 2019). Many residents haven't been able to do it themselves, so we decided to help before the next storms hit. Some people were actually living in tent-like shelters and had lost their entire homes.





And that was a good decision, because on May 14th, Typhoon Ambo (international name: Vongfong) hit Northern Samar. It was the first typhoon of the year and very strong. Heavy rain and ferocious winds led to another disaster. We had evacuees from both the Senior Center and the Multi-Purpose Building. A man with broken ribs was brought to our clinic by the village emergency team. He had been knocked off his motorcycle by a falling branch. The power outage occurred again, and large parts of Eastern and Northern Samar were flooded. A state of emergency was declared. The clinic was flooded, but this time there was no major damage to the building, as we had just repaired it. Unfortunately, the situation on the farm was different. After a very good harvest at the beginning of the year and during the quarantine period, everything there was destroyed. All the fruit and vegetables were lying on the ground. The planting racks for the vegetables were broken and could not be repaired. The palm roofs for the medicinal plants and animal stables were also damaged.





It was time to start all over again, and that's what we did. The planting racks were replaced with cement ones, we installed a new drainage system along the clinic, and cemented the access path to the garden.



At times, it also became difficult to provide supplies, and we struggled to maintain the feeding program for the children. We currently have 74 children in this program. This worried us greatly, as the children are very important to us and the program is a great help to the families, especially since many fathers here have also lost their jobs. The shortage arose because ferry service was partially suspended and no supplies were arriving from Manila. So, here, too, we had to improvise.



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As you can see, it's never boring here. New challenges keep coming our way. The last few months have been truly difficult, especially since we haven't been able to leave. For the first time, I truly felt that I'm on an island. At times, it was even frightening, especially when the typhoon hit. So, our special thanks go to everyone who continually encourages us, writes to us, and supports us with financial and material aid. Without your help, we wouldn't be able to help the people here so much. In all our activities, our primary focus is always the patient who comes to us for help. And we are happy and grateful that we have been able to provide this help for so many years.

Now I wish you all a wonderful rest of the summer, stay healthy, and send my warmest regards until we see each other again, hopefully in December at our Annual General Meeting.

Yours,

Sabine Korth

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