

[Draft]

The life of a HCW testing positive for coronavirus

By: Christina Quiambao

As a specimen collector for Philippine Red Cross (PRC) - Mandaluyong, Mary Joy "Majoy" Esguerra, 23, exposes herself almost daily to coronavirus.

She started to work in PRC - Mandaluyong last April 15 and from the 136 samples they tested back then in the laboratories, the number increased drastically to 1,800 two months after as the restrictions on community quarantine loosed up over the past few weeks.

Graduating Medical Technology last May 2019, she knew that her life will be put at risk countless times in the medical field. However, she along with numerous other health care workers (HCW) would unfortunately become the same patients they were helping to recover.

Upon finding out that her co-worker recently tested positive for coronavirus, she immediately called her family to prepare them for the worst. "sinabihan ko na sila para i-ready na nila yung sarili nila kung ano man yung magiging result ng test ko,"

On that same night after the call, she started experiencing symptoms of the virus. "Parang alam ko na noon kasi nag-on and off yung fever ko. Noong una akala ko trangkaso or flu lang tas ayun, nawala na rin ng pang-amoy at panlasa,"

On July 21, two months and one week after she started working in Philippine Red Cross, she received the test results from the same laboratory she collected specimens for. It was confirmed. She was positive for traces of SARS-CoV-2, also known as COVID-19.

The next day, an ambulance arrived for her and she was taken into a quarantine facility.

Inside the quarantine facility

The quarantine facility didn't allow any outside belongings nor food and it was one of her concerns upon arriving there. "Hindi naman kami nakapaghanda, wala kaming pagkain na nadala para sa amin," She jokingly said that the food in the facility was so repetitive that she often got tired of eating them. Nevertheless, she remained complacent with the protocols set in the facility, to fastrack her recovery.

In the quarantine facility, she says that their temperature was being checked daily, at 1:00 pm and at 8:00 pm. "Chinecheck din yung pulse rate, bp [blood pressure], and oxygen saturation," She also adds that the facility also decontaminates everyday.

As a health care worker (HCW), she knew the gruelling process of having to cater to unreasonable patients and so, she complied with the daily check-ups in the facility and did her best to recover as soon as she could.

On the other side of the perspective, after two of the group had tested positive of the virus, there was a stop in operations for specimen collectors in PRC Mandaluyong. Her co-workers voluntarily quarantined themselves in the apartel accommodation to prevent further spread.

As part of their institution's protocols, they must first be tested negative two times in order to resume to work. For the mean time, specimen collectors from other branches took their place as they focused on taking care of their health in quarantine.

After testing positive and recovering

Recovery wasn't the only hurdle she had to go through after testing positive for coronavirus. She saw how treatment drastically changed when she faced discrimination in the workplace after going back. "Habang nagwowork kami, ayaw nilang humawak sa lamesa namin kahit naka PPEs naman kami," She recounts how it goes even beyond as to how they were being treated as human beings saying "sobrang diring diri sila samin. Noong lunch break, doon nila nilalagay sa work area yung food namin, yung mismong lamesa na ayaw nila hawakan,"

Even at times wherein she would just be travelling home after two days worth of her shift, she would get looks from commuters saying that they would often look at her from head to toe. "Baka tingin nila samin na positive na kami agad, na may virus na agad na ikakalat namin sa kanila,"

However, she says that as a HCW, she just continues to brush off such discriminations and poor treatments. "Parang tinanggap ko na lang. Iniisip ko na siguro nag-iingat na lang rin sila. Kailangan mong intindihin; di mo sila pwedeng sagutin, sungitan,"

Despite spending 10 days in the quarantine facility, it wasn't cut off from her salary. "Gusto ko rin sabihin na hindi totoo yung 100k para sa frontliner. Siguro kapag naintubate na sila o kaya severe cases na,"

Senate Bill No. 1418 states that a 100,000 pesos compensation would be given for both public and private health workers "severely" infected by the disease while in line of duty.

Call for better treatment to HCWs

As a HCW, she knew that there is bound to be instances wherein their life will be put at risk. "Sa frontliner, hindi mo naman talaga malalaman kung pano ka maeexpose, kahit na sabihin mong naka PPE ka and everything,"

However, at the very least she says that there should be better compensation for the work they've done so far given the demands and restrictions brought about by the health crisis. "Gusto namin yung deserve namin treatment tulad nung hazard pay. Kasi until now, wala pa rin yung hazard pay na sinasabi nila,"

On August 1, Senator Cynthia Villar dismissed the call of HCWs to put Metro Manila under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) saying "Hindi na siguro. Pagbutihin nila (medical frontline workers) trabaho nila,"

But according to HCWs like Majoy, the work they do isn't the problem. "Pagbutihin yung work pero alam naman natin siguro na sobra sobra na yung binigay namin sa work. Sana iincrease man lang yung sahod. Buhay na yung tinataya mo tapos sa ganoong halaga na sahod lang," she said.

She also includes the sentiments of her friends who have struggles to acquire PPEs for the past couple of weeks. "Di na siya peak ng donation eh, so parang nagkukulang na sa PPE, coverall, food. Hindi sa work namin, pero yung friend namin na nagwowork, mga washable na PPEs na lang ang ginagamit,"

Dozens of doctors' groups warned that the Philippines was losing the coronavirus fight, and called for a "timeout" They urged President Rodrigo Duterte to tighten a recently eased lockdown to an Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) as cases surged and hospitals are forced to turn away patients.

After 3 months since General Community Quarantine (GCQ), Metro Manila was reverted back to ECQ for 15 days starting August 4, 2020.