

PRESS RELEASE

9 million public school students to get free oral health care

Some nine million elementary students in public schools are set to benefit from an expanded oral health care program inked today between the Department of Education, through its School Health and Nutrition Center and the Adopt-a-School Program (ASP), and Colgate Palmolive Philippines, Inc. (CPPI).

In a memorandum of agreement (MOA), DepEd and CPPI will renew its commitment to promote oral health care among all public schools nationwide, targeting some nine million children for three years.

According to Education Secretary Armin Luistro, the project is expected to minimize school absenteeism and better students' performance. "Our experience shows that when children are bothered by dental problems, they could hardly focus on the lesson and would not participate in activities, thus affecting their learning ability," said Luistro.

Most recent studies show that dental problem is one of the main reasons of absenteeism which eventually lead to students dropping out from school.

For more than 10 years now, CPPI, DepEd and various dental associations have been working hand in hand to provide oral health awareness education and dental services to public school children nationwide. In fact, for the last four consecutive school years (S.Y. 2010-2011, 2009-2010, 2008-2009, 2007-2008), CPPI and DepEd have successfully implemented major programs including the Bright Futures (BSBF) program and Zero Cavity Mission (ZCM) Dental Caravan project to 50 selected public schools in different islands of the Philippines and distribution of the BSBF Oral Care Kit to all public schools nationwide.

Since the previous agreement will expire on March as SY 2010-2011 ends, CPPI and DepEd renewed the partnership that will take effect in June this year or the start of SY 2011-2012. Jointly implementing BSBF program in the next three school years, DepEd and CPPI target some 2.9 million children in 2011-2012, three million in 2012-2013, and 3.1 million in 2013-2014.

Under the BSBF program, oral health care kit consisting of toothpaste, toothbrushes, and oral hygienic guides will be distributed to over 114,000 schools nationwide for three years. The project will cost P18.783M for 2011-2012, P20.446M for 2012-2013, and P22.274M for 2013-2014 amounting to P61.5M.

On the other hand, the ZCM targets about 15,000 Grade 1 pupils in 50 schools (an average of 300 pupils per school) nationwide per year are to receive free dental health services and treatments such as oral prophylaxis, restoration, flouridization and extraction. This project will also tap the services of the Philippine Association of Dental Colleges (PADC). This project costs about P11M.

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Oral health lectures and reinforcement of the 7:00am tooth brushing drill to selected public schools will also be conducted as part of the ZCM Dental Caravan Project.

The partnership was not limited to dental missions for it also launched recycling and poster making contests through the *Zero Cavities, Zero Waste Contest* that give students the chance not only to demonstrate their creative skills and learn camaraderie and teamwork among peers, but also to promote proper waste management through the art works they produce.

“Our gratitude goes to CPPI and PADC for allocating funds and human resources on this partnership which is consistent with our goal of producing healthy and well-educated basic education graduates,” added Luistro.

Aside from Luistro, also present during the MOA signing were DepEd-HNC Director Thelma Navarrez, President and General Manager of Colgate-Palmolive Phils., Inc. Ms. Lucie Clair Vincent, Professional Oral Care Manager of CPPI, Dr. Angel David, PADC President Dr. Arturo De Leon, and ASP Operations Manager Ms. Merlie Asprer.

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