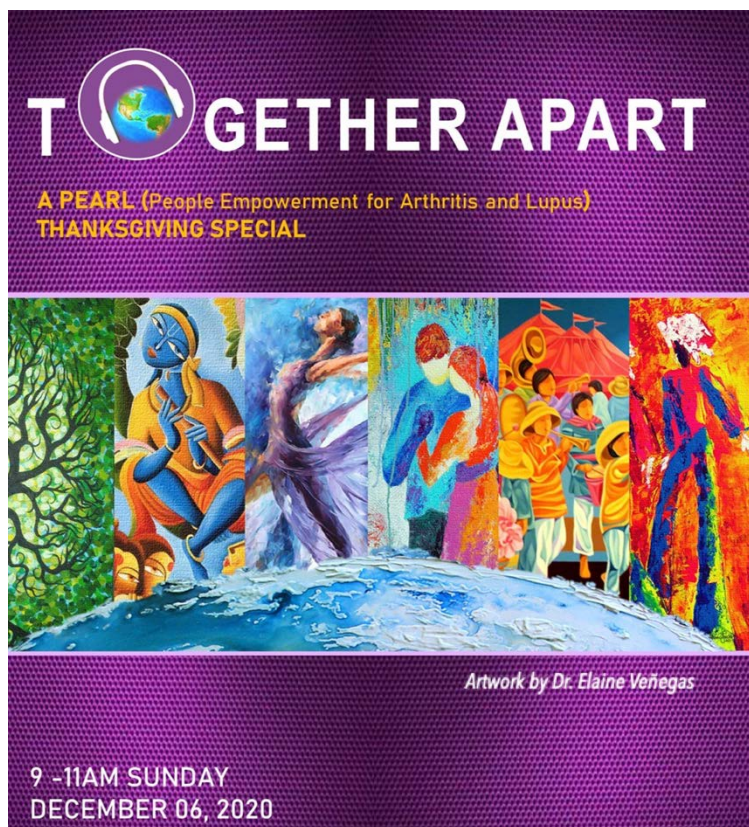


“TOGETHER, APART”: A PEARL VisMin (Visayas Mindanao) THANKSGIVING

by Cheryl Anne A. Dela Cruz-Tan, MD

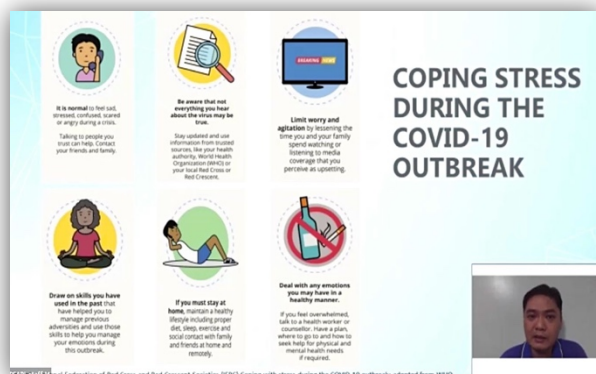
The pandemic has brought so many changes in our lives, and it is during this trying times that again we experience a new window that opened when one door closed. When we conceived that a get-together for patients seem unlikely because of COVID, the very first PEARL Visayas Mindanao Thanksgiving Special happened on December 06, 2020 from 9 to 11 on a beautiful Sunday morning. It was a virtual event, entitled “Together, Apart” convening rheumatologists and patients from Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao!



The program started with an ecumenical prayer, showcasing the Lumads, Muslims and Christians giving praise to our Creator, followed by the National Anthem. The emcees for the said event were Dr. Helmar Soldevilla, a rheumatologist based in Iloilo City, Dr. Catherine Macapagal-Liwanag and Dr. Cheryl Anne Dela Cruz-Tan, both rheumatologists from Davao City. The opening remarks was given by Dr. Caroline Arroyo, a rheumatologist from Iloilo and adviser of Lupus Panay Group. This was followed by a very informative lecture entitled “Ang Akong Rayuma sa Panahon sa COVID” given by Dr. James Bermas, a rheumatologist from Cebu City.



Dr. Caroline Arroyo, Rheumatologist from Iloilo



Dr. James Bermas, Rheumatologist from Cebu

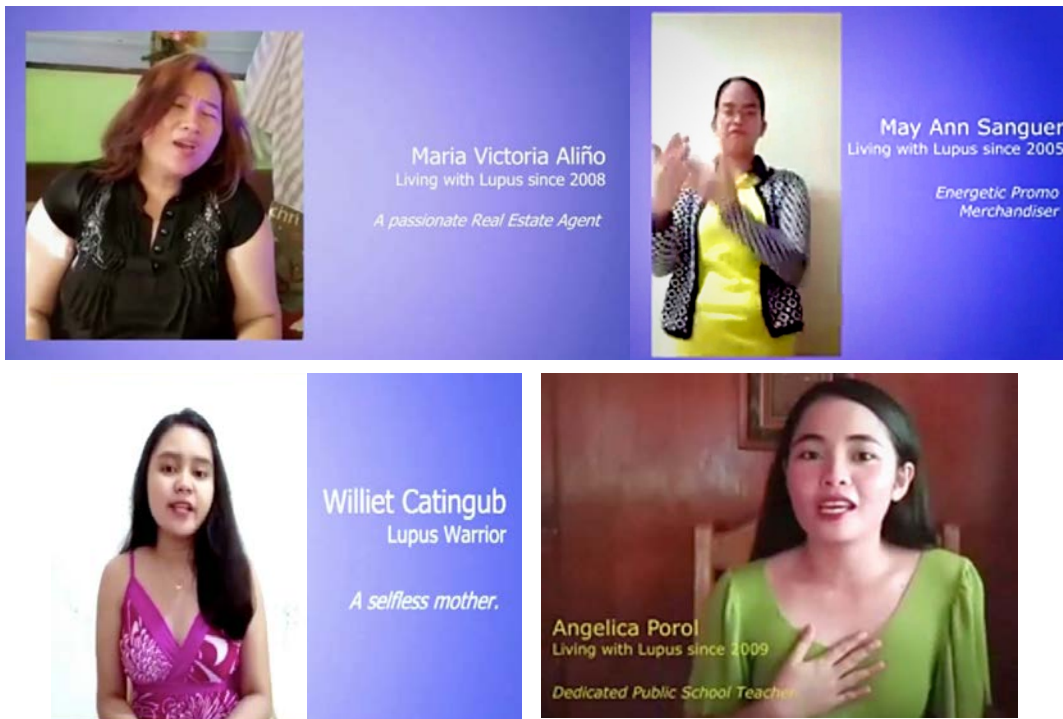
Inspiring messages were given by Mrs. Ruth Sanchez, a rheumatoid arthritis patient from Davao del Norte, Mr. Clark Ferrer, president of Ankylosing Spondylitis Association of the Philippines, Ms. Helen Faith Estante, a scleroderma patient from Iloilo City, Rev. Magnolia Nova Mendoza, a psoriatic arthritis patient from Dumaguete City and Ms. Cathy Zulueta, an SLE patient based in Manila whose roots are in Davao. A lovely intermission rendition of the “Fight Song” (by Rachel Platten) was presented by the members of the Lupus Foundation of Southern Mindanao, whose beautiful voices resonated with great zeal symbolizing their struggles to fight their condition.



(l-r) Abegail Calamaya [Lupus from Tacloban], Ruth Sanchez [Rheumatoid Arthritis from Butuan], Clark Ferrer [Ankylosing Spondylitis from NCR]



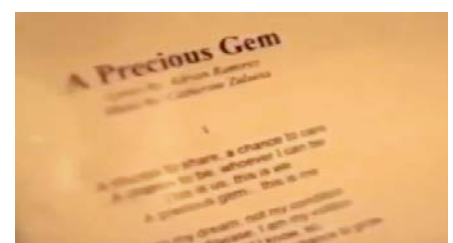
(l-r) Helen Estante [Scleroderma from Iloilo], Rev. Magnolia Mendoza [Psoriatic Arthritis from Dumaguete], Catherine Zulueta [Lupus from Davao/Manila]



Fight song cover by members of Lupus Foundation of Southern Mindanao

The open forum was very stimulating and highly interactive. The panelists discussed challenges during the pandemic, and how they each coped to overcome these obstacles. They also shared new hobbies and newly discovered skills gained during the pandemic. These provided ideas to the viewers on what they can do as an alternative to their usual activities during the nonCOVID times. They also gave words of encouragement to all patients, and expressed their appreciation to their doctors. They reminded everyone that the strong partnership among support groups, doctors, family and friends, accompanied by fervent prayers, will ultimately help them survive and surpass the challenges of living with a chronic disease. Everyone was deeply moved by the open forum because patients and even doctors felt that their messages struck a nerve.

The closing message was given by Dr Llewellyn Hao, a rheumatologist from Davao City and an adviser for the Lupus Foundation of Southern Mindanao. She emphasized the importance of remembering the things that we all should be grateful for, specially this coming Christmas. We ended the program with words from Dr. Sandra Navarra, the heart and brains behind PEARL. She shared the experiences of all the other patients, who despite their deformities, strived hard to make life worth living. She concluded the program by sharing the song “Precious Gem,” whose beautiful lyrics were written by a PEARL friend Mr. Adrian Ramirez, with the soulful music composed by Ms. Cathy Zulueta.



The first Visayas Mindanao thanksgiving special was one for the books! It was motivating, inspiring and uplifting, all at the same time. It gave more meaning to everyone's lives, assuring us that although we are all facing our own struggles during these trying times, there are always people who are willing to give a helping hand. It reminds us that as we struggle through some bad days, we actually earn the best days of our lives. Indeed, there will always be countless blessings to be thankful for. Let me end by sharing an inspiring line from the poem of Robert Frost entitled "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening"

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*



Hosted by: Drs. Helmar Soldevilla (Iloilo), Catherine Macapagal and Cheryl Tan (both from Davao)



Heartfelt thank you. Lupus Inspired Advocacy (LUISA) and People Empowerment for Arthritis & Lupus (PEARL) of Rheumatology Educational Trust Foundation, Inc. (RETFI), the patient support groups, Johnson & Johnson (Phils). Inc., and the steadfast love and support of our family, colleagues and friends.