

History of Nuclear Medicine in the Philippines

The clouds of smoke from the destructive effects of the nuclear bomb explosions in Japan have not totally cleared from the region and continue to serve as a frightening reminder of the misuse of nuclear energy. The fear of extinction, as a result of this powerful human creation, in fact, still lingers. Hence, a community of nations moved forth to develop measures that make it possible for countries to harness and use atomic energy for the greater good. The Philippines, an active participant in this creative desire to redirect this destructive nuclear power into an instrument for global peace, created the Atomic Energy Commission thru its Department of Health in 1949.

A bilateral agreement between the Philippines and the United States of America (U.S.A.) was made to further the efforts of the former in making use of atomic energy through peaceful means. In July 1955, the US granted \$500,000 to the Philippines for the acquisition of an atomic reactor. The grant was made under the condition that the Philippines fund the operation and maintenance of the atomic reactor. In 1958, because of the Science ACT of 1958, the Philippine Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) was also established. It was given the responsibility of developing and regulating atomic energy utilization in the country. From the reactor, Au 198 colloidal gold and radioactive iodide-I-131 was produced.

One of the greatest contributions of PAEC was the growth and development of nuclear medicine in the country. Dr. Paulo Campos, a visionary and an eminent physician, was interested in the study of thyroid diseases and their treatment using nuclear medicine. Through his efforts, the first radioisotope lab with a scintillation scanner, a gamma well counter, a scaler, and several monitors were established and made available at the John F. Cotton Hospital. As a result, they were able to do thyroid studies, treat hyperthyroidism, polycythemia vera and leukemia with P-32.

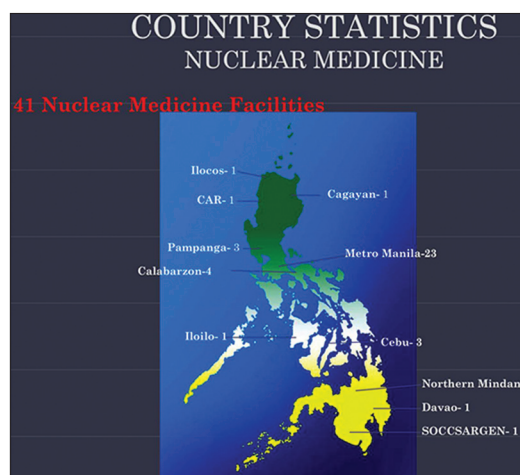


Figure 1: Map of the Philippines showing sites of nuclear medicine department

The growth of Nuclear Medicine also flourished with IAEA's support for study grants. As they say, need is the greatest motivator for new discoveries. (Taken from the book Nuclear Medicine: The Philippine Contribution during the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of NM in the Philippines).

The rest is, as they say, history.

Today, the Philippines has 23 nuclear medicine facilities in Metro Manila, including PET facilities at St. Luke's Medical Center-Quezon City and Saint Luke's Medical Center-Global City, 3 in Cebu, 1 in Davao, 4 in Batangas, 3 in Central Luzon, 2 in Cagayan de oro and 1 in Tuguegarao [Figure 1]. We also have 101 doctors, including residents, and approximately 260 technologists.

Truly, Nuclear Medicine has grown since its early days in the Philippines and continues to grow even more in the service of the Filipino people.

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