

Breakthrough seen in dengue treatment

By Jerry E. Esplanada | Philippine Daily Inquirer | Monday, October 20th, 2014



A staff from the DOH NCR Center for Health Development does spraying on adult mosquitoes and application of larvicide in stagnant waters in an informal settlers' neighborhood in Barangay Damayan, Quezon City, to prevent the possible spread of dengue in this file photo. The Department of Health has adopted a two-day regimen that combats dengue, a mosquito-borne disease that has claimed the lives of at least 1,680 people in more than 416,000 cases reported in the Philippines over the past three years. INQUIRER PHOTO/LYN RILLON

MANILA, Philippines—The Department of Health (DOH) has adopted a two-day regimen that combats dengue, a mosquito-borne disease that has claimed the lives of at least 1,680 people in more than 416,000 cases reported in the Philippines over the past three years.

Called “ActRx TriAct,” the regimen consists of a single use of an Artemether sublingual spray combined with doses of Artesunate and Berberine tablets. Artemether and

Artesunate are derivatives of Artemisinin, which, for more than 5,000 years, has been used effectively in Chinese medical treatments for malaria.

After five years of study and testing, the treatment was discovered by Preferred and Proven Therapies Inc., a firm operating at the former Clark Air Base in Pampanga province in collaboration with ActRx Foundation, an international humanitarian and medical research group based in North Palm Beach, Florida, in the United States.

The DOH has yet to formally announce the breakthrough.

But Health Secretary Enrique Ona has issued Department Order No. 2014-0161 calling for the “implementation of a national anti-dengue program utilizing ActRx TriAct for the treatment of dengue by the Philippine National Institute of Traditional and Alternative Health Care (PITAHC).”

In the Sept. 24 directive, a copy of which was obtained by the Inquirer, Ona said that “in line with its mandate to protect public health and guarantee public access to essential drugs, the DOH—in collaboration with PITAHC and the Department of Science and Technology (DOST)—shall make available and integrate the ActRx TriAct treatment into the national health-care program for dengue.”

He also called for the inclusion of ActRx TriAct in the Philippine National Drug Formulary, “subject to the review by the Formulary Executive Council in accordance with existing rules and regulations.”

Remarkable results

Ona said that “on March 15, Preferred and Proven Therapies Inc., ActRx Foundation and ActRx Operational Group, together with PITAHC and San Lazaro Hospital for Infectious Diseases medical research team, presented a report showing the remarkable success of the clinical trials conducted at San Lazaro Hospital on ActRx TriAct, a patented herbal-based combination of Artesunate, Berberine and Artemether as therapy treatment for dengue.”

“After its independent study, the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development of the DOST likewise noted the remarkable results of ActRx TriAct and fully endorsed the implementation of a national program using the said treatment,” he said.

Ona quoted prominent physician Jaime Montoya as saying that a “review of the [ActRx TriAct] protocol shows that it is scientifically valid and sound to be carried out in hospitals.”

That was why the “integration of the ActRx TriAct treatment in the standard of care and management of dengue incidents in the Philippines” is warranted, Ona said.

He noted that “currently, there is no specific treatment for dengue.”

“The standard of care administered to patients afflicted with dengue involves only maintenance of the patient’s body fluid volume and relief of symptoms,” he said.

Epidemic

According to Ona, “dengue in the Philippines has in recent years become an epidemic.”

In 2012, there were 187,031 cases of dengue with 921 deaths, as reported by the National Epidemiology Center of the DOH. In 2013, the DOH recorded 204,906 dengue cases and 660 deaths. Peak incidence occurred during the wet season [so] the rainy season has become synonymous with “dengue outbreak season.”

This year, some “24,900 cases have resulted in [at least] 100 deaths, or a ratio of one fatality for every 249 cases,” Ona said.

Aside from San Lazaro Hospital in Manila, the agency has authorized state-run hospitals to administer ActRx TriAct treatments to dengue patients: East Avenue Medical Center, Dr. Jose Rodriguez Memorial Medical Center, Amang Rodriguez Memorial Medical Center, Quirino Memorial Medical Center and Jose B. Lingad Memorial Regional Hospital, among others.

Global significance

Robert Steele, ActRx Foundation Advisory Board chair, said the discovery of a cure for dengue “has both global and historical significance.”

“The data, charts and research findings are quite technical and may be daunting to non-doctors. But allow me to declare it in the simplest way possible: Dengue has been cured,” he said.

In a statement, Steele asserted that “soon, the rest of the world will no longer live in fear or die from this dreaded disease.”

ActRx Foundation, he vowed, “will work closely with the DOH to make the cure available on a nationwide scale.”

Ceiling price

To ensure that the anti-dengue treatment will be accessible and affordable, Steele said the Foundation would set a “ceiling price for a single, full-cycle treatment.”

“Profit was never ever our motivation for doing this. Quite literally, we are in the business of saving lives and we want to do it now,” he added.

Upon the treatment’s initial nationwide rollout, which will be made shortly, Steele’s group plans to donate some 100,000 treatments to the DOH “for distribution to indigent dengue sufferers.”

For his part, Climate Change Commissioner Heherson Alvarez referred to ActRx TriAct as “another excellent example of President Aquino’s public-private partnership program working for the good of the Filipino people.”

“The Climate Change Commission has been supporting this research since Day 1. One of the adverse side effects of climate change is the likely increase of vector-borne diseases, such as dengue and malaria. But now that we have this cure, that’s one less worry to deal with and we can focus more on solutions to other climate change-related problems,” he told the Inquirer.

Alvarez, who worked diligently with ActRx Foundation to get DOH involvement and approval of the cure, explained that “the impact of dengue on the Philippines goes beyond morbidity and mortality.”

The disease “crosses socioeconomic barriers, devastates communities, delays urban planning initiatives and puts a tremendous strain on local governments and state hospitals,” he said.

“The discovery of ActRx TriAct will change all that,” Alvarez said.