

## When Blood Becomes Life



### Can you tell us a bit about yourself, your educational background, work experience, awards or other accomplishments, and other highlights of your career?

I am Ma. Lourdes U. Concepcion. A wife, mother of three, grandmother of one, a practicing Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioner (Acupuncture, Qi gong), an Anatomic Pathology – Clinical Pathology (AP-CP) fellow. I taught Physiology for five years at the University of the East Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Medical Center (UERMMM) and eight years in Pathology at the Ateneo de Manila University School of Medicine and Public Health (ASMPH); I retired from government service in 2023. I still work in a Local Government Unit (LGU) Health Department. As a Pathology resident (1992-1995), I was assigned to Mobile Blood Donations in 1994. This was when Philippine Children's Medical Center (PCMC) was slowly transitioning from buying blood from commercial blood banks to collecting blood from voluntary blood donors. Since then, I have been involved with the Blood Bank, ultimately becoming the Pediatric Blood Center

chair in 2015 until 2023. In between these years, I served at the PSP's Board of Governors (BOG) and Board of Pathology (BOP). The Philippine Blood Coordinating Council (PBCC) was the venue for me to train other medically allied professionals in blood banking. The DOH also sent me to various workshops, local and abroad, all for the improvement of blood transfusion services in the country. I was also with the Philippine Blood Center on several capacities since its inception. The PCMC Pediatric Blood Center (PedBC) has received awards: the Civil Commission's Gawad Pag-asa Awards in 2001; Sandugo Awards from 2001-2005 by the DOH; Second runner-up in the International Society for Blood Transfusion (ISBT) award for developing countries in 2018, Canada. And I have been awarded the Philippine Blood Coordinating Council Jorge M. Peralta Lecture Award, 2018 and the Bronze Medal for Excellence for Health Services during Crisis at the World Hospital Congress, Dubai 2022. I view all these awards as recognition of the collective efforts of colleagues and staff. They were a proof of the PCMC Blood Bank's commitment to uphold the standards of VBD and transfusion practices in the Quezon City area, particularly in the field of pediatrics. The highlights of my career? To witness the residents and interns I have trained excel in this field and embrace the call for a safe, quality, affordable and accessible blood/blood products.

I am honored to be assigned Chair of the National Council for Blood Services (NCBS) technical committee to help formulate standards and guidelines for the operation of the blood services and to ensure the highest levels of quality and safety for donors, patients and staff.

### What is your take on the current blood safety and blood supply landscape in the Philippines?

There is a dire need for a stronger political will to prioritize the blood services program of the country, then the blood supply will be safe, will be of quality, accessible, and affordable. We are often described as the calamity capital of the world, after all.

### What would you consider as weaknesses or challenges in the blood program?

The blood program is not a standalone program of DOH. As part of the Public Health Services Cluster (PHSC), its partners or networks are with Centers for Health Development (CHDs), LGUs, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), Civil Society and People's Organization, and other government agencies at regional/provincial/city/municipal level and the private sector. If all these partners have the same standards to follow and carry out the mandates they were given in the interest of safety to all, then the program will be valuable and meaningful. Harmonization of the regulations and standards that are comprehensible to all stakeholders still needs to be implemented. This is a basic need that requires urgent attention and collaboration.

ISSN 2507-8364 (Online)  
 Printed in the Philippines.  
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 Received: 30 January 2025.  
 Accepted: 30 January 2025.  
 Published online first: 11 June 2025.  
<https://doi.org/10.21141/PJP.2025.03>

Corresponding author: Ma. Lourdes U. Concepcion, MD  
 E-mail: [mlucon@yahoo.com](mailto:mlucon@yahoo.com)  
 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9554-7487>





The Philippine Children’s Medical Center (PCMC) Pediatric Blood Center (PedBC).



Second runner-up in the International Society for Blood Transfusion (ISBT) award for developing countries in 2018, Canada.



The Bronze Medal for Excellence for Health Services during Crisis at the World Hospital Congress, Dubai 2022.



The Philippine Blood Coordinating Council (PBCC) Jorge M. Peralta Lecture Award, 2018.

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**What key reforms do you think should be undertaken to advance the blood program in the country?**

A clear direction from the NCBS Executive committee as regards standards with close collaboration with the regulatory agency. A panel of experts in government is essential to guide and monitor all processes applied to the blood unit from the donor to the recipient. Regular and open communication among the blood services, not only to share blood units, but also to share best practices and help the blood service facilities thrive in a limited resource country like ours. The increased use of social media and technology can raise awareness on the need for blood from volunteers.

**How optimistic are you that we will be able to achieve stronger blood supply systems?**

I am hopeful that each step, no matter how small, will improve the lives of the patients we serve. It was 30 years ago, when I witnessed the slow but sure phase out of the high-risk commercial blood banks. I was then part of the system when buying blood from commercial blood banks was the standard. I hope for a future where safe blood is universally accessible to patients across the Philippines.