

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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C HICAGO (*FAXX/jGLi*) – Philippine-born Mary Charmaine Abalos Ogoy must be so impressed by the medical team, who treated her lupus – a chronic inflammatory disease that can affect various parts of the body, specially the skin, joints, blood and kidneys – that when she recovered from her illness, she vowed to pay back to society by pursuing a nursing program so she can “provide that same care for others as well.”

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Last week, Ms. Ogoy took her first step when she graduated salutatorian in the practical nursing program at the Northwestern Institute of Health & Technology at 3432 Oakton St., Skokie, Illinois, which touts itself as “still the best LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse) School in Chicago (and Skokie too!), managed by a Filipino American – Ms. Jenita P. Julian (nee: Pilapil), NIHT’s President and Chief Executive Officer, who holds an M.B.A. (Masters of Business Administration) degree.

As a full-time employee, Ms. Ogoy could not confirm in advance with her school if she could attend the graduation ceremonies at the Holiday Inn Chicago North Shore Skokie Hotel on 5300 West Touhy in Skokie because of conflict of her work schedule. But she was “so thankful I was still welcomed to attend (the graduation) for the little time I could.”

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Ms. Ogoy was one of the 57 graduates of the 2013 Practical Nursing Program, whose keynote speaker, Dr. Julie Zerwic, Executive Associate Dean of the College of Nursing of the University of Illinois, Chicago (UIC), described the graduation as a “cause for celebration. You have to take time and reflect on your journey; all of the steps you took along this path and to take a moment to thank all of those who supported you along the way.”

Ms. Ogoy’s dotting parents –her father, Dan, from Quezon City and her publicity-shy mother, from Batangas, who wanted to keep her name private - were also on hand to wish her well.

Scanning the faces of the graduates and going over the list of the names of graduates, this reporter noted that Filipino Americans were a small minority among the graduates evenly composed of blacks, Latinos and other Asian ethnic groups.

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But because the school's six-member board is composed of a vice chair in Ms. Julian and another Filipino American board member, Chicago-based *Viva Times*

newsmagazine publisher and CPRTV producer and host Ms. Veronica Leighton, the school was able to invite its special guest in the graduation ceremonies, Philippine Consul General Leo M. Herrera-Lim, who was mistakenly called to the stage as "Consul General Jose Herrera-Lim" to award an honor student along with school board member, Dr. Ekkehard-Teja Wilke.

Dr. Zerwic told the graduates that perceptions among minority graduates have greatly improved as studies have shown that "teams of scientists from diverse backgrounds are more likely to develop innovative solution and solve complex problems than teams of scientists who lack diversity.

"It is imperative that we develop transformative programs to increase the number of other minorities in bio medical (fields). ... The National Institute has allowed UIC to work with minority students to build that bridge from community college program to baccalaureate degree."

FOUR “C’s” OF SUCCESS

For her part, Dulcelina A. Stahl, Ph. D., NIHT's Dean of Academic Affairs and Program Administrator, in brief remarks, told the graduates to remember the four “C’s” to success – Competence, Courage, Continuing Education and Commitment to Excellence.

For competence, preparing to be the best nurses is not good enough. They have to build on what they know already. For courage, they have to reflect what something means. “When I come across challenges that seem to be very impossible to overcome and I fail, I don’t give up. I muster my courage to get up and move on.”

For continuing education, “see you next year towards associate nursing program at NIHT and baccalaureate degree at UIC.” For commitment to excellence, be “excellent in whatever we do. We are committed to excellence in our profession and relations with other people. Broaden your horizon, spread your wings and soar with the eagles.”

Ana Becerra, who graduated with Certified Patient Care Technician certificate, in inspirational remarks, said her undocumented status did not deter her from employing in her dream job – to work in a hospital. “We can accomplish whatever we love to do. ... Thru hard work, dedication and love and support by those around us. *Si se puede* (Yes, we can).”

Mary Smith Satkowski, LPN valedictorian and president of the student

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council, said, “From complete strangers, unsure of what we are getting ourselves into, we came from different backgrounds. But we have one thing in common: our passion for nursing and desire to make a difference in the lives of our patients and families.

“Nursing is more than just tests and grades and spending few extra moments with patients, who are scared. Instead of rushing to punch out when shift is over, we should find dignity when giving patient a bath. Nursing is in our hearts and minds. Nurses are angels in comfortable shoes.”

NIHT is probably the only one LPN and other allied health offering program educational institution in Illinois and the Midwest run by a Filipino American. Al Cabusas of the Fil Am Career Center Corp. based in Burlingame, California, a distance clinical training/related learning experience nursing program institution affiliated with University of Visayas, said there are probably five allied health program institutions, like NIHT, in San Francisco Bay area, four in Los Angeles, about two or three in New York and in Michigan being managed by Filipino Americans. (lariosa_jos@sbcglobal.net

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