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Seasons and Times, Reasons and Rhymes: *Di Niyo Ba Naririnig?**

Philippine Medical Association President Dr. Jojo Santiago, Missy and my Central Tagalog Region One Day Family; Singapore Association of Medical Journal Editors President Professor Wilfred Peh and my Singapore family- Mom, Bernie, Miranda, Angie and Lilli; Philippine Association of Medical Journal Editors (PAMJE) President-Elect Professor Cecile Maramba – Lazarte and Asawa Ramel, Anak Miggy, Pamangkin Zoe, Tatay Dr. Tomas Maramba and Nanay Professor Emeritus Dr. Nelia Cortez-Maramba; my dear PAMJE Colleagues Professors Caster Palaganas and Joseph Quebral and Doctors Phel Esmaquel and Mads Tandoc, PAMJE members and our hardworking Secretariat, Philippine Council for Health Research and Development -Department of Science and Technology (PCHRD-DOST) Director Mel Opeña and Belle Intia, World Health Organization - Western Pacific Region Office (WHO-WPRO) Ms. Alma Prosperoso, guests, friends, ladies and gentlemen:

*"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,
it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,
it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity,
it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness,
it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."*

— Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*¹

Who would have thought that our vision of 2020 had been so blurred, so obscured by rose-colored lenses and peripheral blinders of what we once considered normal, that we were oblivious to the insidious turn of events that continues even today to change our lives and our world? This evening is an example (however small) of that change - originally set for March 16 at Ibarra's Garden, we are celebrating virtually and remotely from separate venues five months hence. What will today be seen as from the perspective of another five months?

Indeed, the past months have seen **the worst of times**. We remember our fears and frustrations as we battled an unseen enemy that mercilessly claimed our plans and programs as it killed our friends and colleagues. It was an **age of foolishness** as we witnessed the unrelenting spread of COVIDIOTS in disbelief and bewilderment. An **epoch of incredulity** as our scientific expertise and social interventions proved inutile while our so-called leaders failed to lead, engaging in petty pathetic distractions as they selfishly pillaged and plundered our nation and people instead. A depressing **season of darkness** heralding a cold, cruel **winter of despair**.

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***Valedictory Address during the Turnover and Induction Ceremonies of the Philippine Association of Medical Journal Editors Inc. on August 7, 2020**



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But we did not surrender. As medical professionals and researchers, reviewers and editors, we took up stethoscope and scalpel, pen and paper and patiently plodded on. Informing ourselves with the latest and best evidence (or engaging in research to add to that evidence), we sifted through the “infodemic” to cope with the pandemic as we navigated seemingly-endless zoom meetings and webinars, researched, reviewed or edited and published our findings, and attended to patients. The boundaries between night and day, weekday and weekend, office and home disappeared as we worked from home, or tried to make a home of our workplaces (fearful of contaminating our families with the dread disease).

Thus, **these are the best of times**, because we continue to hold the fort, the last line of defense. Against all odds (including personal burnout and the very real possibility of becoming COVID positive ourselves), we persist in upholding our sacred pledge to consecrate our lives to the service of humanity, in whatever manner possible. It is an **age of wisdom**. Those of us who continue to pursue research, to review and edit, to write and publish, and who facilitate the means for others to do so in these trying times add to that wisdom. Indeed, as the novelist-playwright Edward Bulwer-Lytton has Cardinal Richelieu (on discovering a plot to kill him) proclaim: “*The pen is mightier than the sword!*”² None are more cognizant of this than we who have taken up the daunting but thankless role of editor. If in the words of the great Doctor José Protacio Rizal (through the jeweler Simoun’s discourse with Basilio)³ “*It is a useless life that is not consecrated to a great ideal ... like a stone wasted on a field without becoming a part of any edifice,*” then our lives consecrated to publishing vital health information and dispelling disinformation for the benefit of our patients and the public, and informing clinical practice and health policy are far from useless. Let us continue to serve as Sentinels of Science and bring about **the epoch of belief**.

It is time to move forward, and we do that by looking back. As Doctor Rizal also said, drawing on the popular Tagalog proverb⁴

“*Ang hindi marunong lumingon sa pinanggalingan hindi makakarating sa paroroonan*” (they who do not know how to look back at whence they came from will not reach their destination). The past decade would not have been possible without the many people who made PAMJE happen. In particular, I thank the PCHRD-DOST for the unwavering support of our plans, programs and projects. Director Merl Opeña and “Merl’s girls” headed by Ms. Belle Intia, our Secretary Tine Alayon, and Executive Director Dr. Jimmy Montoya. The WHO WPRO Ms. Alma Mila Prosperoso (and the Medical and Health Librarian’s Association of the Philippines, MAHLAP), Chandani Thapa, Marie Villemin-Partow, and Charlie Raby. We have come a long way from the first set of office bearers- - Vice Presidents Drs. Ric Guanzon (*The Filipino Family Physician*) and Nenet Santiago - San Juan (*Philipp J Obstetrics and Gynecology*), Secretary Dr. Madeline Sosa (*Philipp J Neurology*) and Treasurer Dr. Gerard Goco (*Philipp J Nuclear Medicine*), Dr. Pat Khu (*Philipp J Ophthalmol*), the other Joey Avila (*Acta Medica Philippina*) and Linda Varona (*PJIM*), and so many others. Forgive a senior citizen’s memory if I inadvertently failed to mention you. To my steadfast colleagues, Cecile Maramba-Lazarte, Caster Palaganas, Joseph Quebral and Phel Esmaguel, none of this would have been possible without you. *Maraming Salamat po*. It is but fitting that together with Mads Tandoc, you take up the torch and usher in **a season of light** and awaken **a spring of hope**.

*Ikaw ba’y makikibaka at hindi maduduwag,
Na gisingin ang mga panatikong bingi’t bulag
Kasinungalingan labanan hanggang mabuwa*

*Di niyo ba naririnig? Tinig ng bayan na galit
Himig ito ng Pilipinong di muli palulupig
Dudurugin ang dilim, ang araw ay mag-aalab
At mga pusong nagtimpi ay magliliyab!*

— Di Niyo Ba Naririnig⁵

Mabuhay kayo; Mabuhay tayo. Mabuhay ang PAMJE!

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- Di Niyo Ba Naririnig?* Filipino translation by Vincent A. de Jesus; additional lyrics by Rody Vera and Joel Sancho. “Do You Hear the People Sing” from *Les Misérables* by Schönberg C-M, Boublil A, Natel J-M, Kretzmer H.