

Manning agency faces raps for health breach

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A Manila-based manning agency is facing criminal complaints from the Quezon City government after it was found transporting a United Kingdom variant patient without notifying concerned government agencies.

Mayor Josefina “Joy” Belmonte said the city’s legal department will file charges early next week against the Baltic Asia Crewing Inc. for violating Republic Act 11332 or the “Mandatory Reporting of Notifiable Diseases and Health Events of Public Concern Act,” among others.

“Instead of bringing the patient to a quarantine facility, this manning agency, without informing the authorities, even booked a ride-hailing app to take the 35-year-old male patient to an apartment in Riverside, Commonwealth here in Quezon City,” Belmonte said. She said the city government, specifically the City Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit (CESU) headed by Dr. Rolando Cruz, was caught unaware, along with the barangay, where the UK variant positive patient stayed.

“We were not aware that a positive patient was in our place; it was really a breach of protocols,” Belmonte said.

She clarified that though the crew management agency was not registered in Quezon City, the local government can still file a case for violating health protocols.

Belmonte said they will also closely coordinate with the Manila government to determine other possible offenses committed by the manning agency and the hotel, also in Manila, where the patient first stayed while fixing his documents to travel again as an overseas Filipino worker (OFW).

Reports from the Department of Health (DoH) showed that the man, who hails from Liloan, Cebu, was the eighth UK variant case, whose sample was collected on January 17. A former OFW from South Korea, who returned to the Philippines last August 2020 and stayed in Cebu, he has been tagged by the Health department as an active case with mild symptoms.

On Nov. 17, 2020, the man moved to Sucat, Parañaque City and made frequent trips to the manning agency in Malate, Manila, which he last visited on January 14 after securing another overseas placement.

While waiting for deployment, the man rode a taxi and stayed in a hotel in Manila on January 17. On the same day, he underwent a swab test in Pasay City and was informed the following day that he tested positive for Covid-19 and his sample was sent to the Philippine Genome Center.

He continued to stay in the same hotel until January 21 and thereafter his agency booked a ride via a ride-hailing app for him to be transferred to an apartment in the riverside area of Barangay Commonwealth.

On February 5, the man’s genome sequencing results showed he contracted the UK variant, also called B117. On February 8, he developed a mild cough and on February 10, his agency arranged another swab test wherein his companion was also swabbed.

Belmonte said CESU personnel were now conducting massive contact tracing and testing in the Commonwealth area to determine if there would be a need to impose lockdowns. The patient and his companion were at the Hope Facility, the city officials said. She also reminded “QCitizens” to continue practicing health protocols such as the wearing of face masks, frequent hand-washing and physical distancing. “Our best defense is still strict adherence to health protocols so we can keep ourselves and our families safe,” Belmonte said.