

Mayors warn medicine hoarders, price manipulators

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At least three mayors in the National Capital Region have issued a warning against medicine hoarding and price manipulation amid the shortage of paracetamol and other drugs for flu and cold-like symptoms.

In separate interviews, **Mayors Josefina**

“Joy” Belmonte of Quezon City, Tobias **“Toby” Tiangco** of Navotas City and Rexlon **“Rex” Gatchalian** of Valenzuela City told The Manila Times they will arrest and prosecute people found engaging in hoarding and price manipulation.

Tiangco and Gatchalian said they have instructed the concerned local departments to check drugstores if they are taking advantage of the scarcity of anti-flu medicines.

On Tuesday, the Department of Health (DoH) gave assurances there was no shortage of paracetamol and similar drugs, but demand for them has shot up because of the emergence of the Omicron variant.

The three mayors have received reports that more people were lining up at drugstores to buy medicines for flu, cough and colds.

nHOARDERS

They suspect some unscrupulous people are behind the dearth of medicines.

“They are preventing people who only want to buy medicines for their family. We won’t let them get away with this,” Belmonte said.

Quezon City Legal Officer Niño Casimiro said the Price Act (Republic Act 7581) considers hoarding and profiteering a crime.

The Consumer Act (RA 7394) on the other hand, imposes criminal liability on unfair and unconscionable sales acts, Casimiro said.

Profiteers will also be penalized under city ordinances that set price limits on basic necessities during calamities and emergency situations.

Belmonte said the local health department has talked with the health centers’ medicine supplier to stock up medicines for fever, colds and cough.

“With the help of our new pharmacy management system, we may not end up having out of stock of medicines for the residents in need,” she said.

In a statement emailed to The Times, Quezon City **Rep. Precious Hipolito Castelo** called on the authorities to arrest hoarders and price manipulators of medicines used to treat Covid-19 symptoms.

“The concerned authorities should enforce these [laws] to protect the interest and welfare of our people, especially the poor. Hoarding denies the poor access to essential products like medicines and increases the prices of these commodities,” Castelo said.

The role of local governments is particularly critical, since they could suspend or revoke the business permits of establishments that hoard or manipulate the prices of products or engage in activities in restraint of trade, she said.

Castelo urged the government and manufacturers to ensure the supply of Covid-19 medicines.

“The best antidote to hoarding and price manipulation is sufficient supply,” she said.