

## - Health self-care

# Self-care: What is it all about?

Stakeholders dig deeper on breaking the barriers to self-care, challenging misconceptions, offering important information

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MUCH has been said about selfcare, and I am certain you have heard about the concept of it, some beliefs about it, or its true meaning. People have different concepts of what selfcare really is.



Beyond taking care of ourselves, the impact of self-care is more far-reaching. Research conducted recently has shown that self-care and the use of self-care products provide a global annual gain of 22 million quality-adjusted life years (QALYs), a measurement of health outcomes that include both length of life and health-related quality of life. The study states that thanks to selfcare, there is a global annual saving of 40.8 billion productive days.

Globally, the practice of proper selfcare has shown to save healthcare systems around \$119 billion per annum (predicted to rise to \$178.8 billion). It has also saved 1.8 billion hours of physician time, which means healthcare workers have more time to focus on patients with more complex conditions that can't be self-managed.

In the Philippines, there is a notion that self-care is [being] selfish and so many Filipinos feel guilty when they do self-care. But what is really self-care? Where do we draw the line between exercising self-care and just being selfish?

Selfcare is self-love

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines self-care as “the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider.”

In commemoration of the 11th International Self-Care Day held every July 24, and in celebration of the 75th anniversary of French-Filipino relations, Sanofi and the French Embassy in the Philippines organized “Health In Your Hands,” a self-care global awareness event that aims to highlight the importance of responsible self-care practices. The intimate gathering, held at Pardon My French (formerly Strumms) in Bel-Air, Makati City was hosted by broadcast journalist Karen Davila. On the panel were H.E.

Michèle Boccoz, Ambassador of the French Republic to the Philippines; Dr. Manuel Dayrit, former Secretary of the Department of Health and former Dean of and current Professor at the Ateneo School of Medicine in Public Health; and

Vanee Gosiengfiao, General Manager of Consumer Healthcare, Sanofi Philippines.

The event was one of Sanofi's thrusts to increase awareness of self-care. Sanofi, a global biopharmaceutical company that is focused on human health, is one of the many companies and organizations that have come

together globally to form the Global Federation of Self-care. The group aims to advance knowledge, studies, and understanding of self-care and now we can share it among individuals.

“Self-care is about being aware of your own health, empowering yourself, and owning your health. More than proper maintenance of health, it is about preventive care -- preventive care vs. sick care. Selfcare is self-love,” Gosiengfiao emphasized.

#### Misperceptions

Davila, known for her piercing questions to her interviewees, posed this question to the panel: what is the biggest challenge or misconception when it comes to self-care?

“The thing with many Filipinos is that they try to avoid going to the doctor, as much as possible. They think that they can prolong the illness, and so they wait for as long as they can before going to the hospital. But what if it’s a disease at an early stage? The prolongation can cost them their life,” Dr. Dayrit pointed out.

At a one-on-one interview later at the event, I asked Dr. Dayrit where the Filipinos are right now in terms of understanding and awareness of self-care.

He was quick to say that there are areas where we do well, and areas where we need to improve upon.

“When it comes to practicing self-care, preventing an illness, and maintaining their health, there are still a lot of Filipinos who display an ‘erratic’ behavior. In wanting to avoid the cost of healthcare, they don’t realize that they are making it worse,” he shares.

Dayrit suspects that this fragmented grasp of the concept has been ingrained in our minds since we were young and has been embedded in our culture. “People need to realize that taking care of ourselves is our own responsibility. It is important to fully understand the value of resting, of not prolonging an illness and knowing when to go to the doctor, of finding the balance, and of communicating these, if need be, to their families or loved ones,” he adds.

#### What needs to be done

To Ambassador Boccoz, self-care is one of our fundamental needs.

“I think prevention [of an illness] is the best way to stay healthy, as well as having healthy habits and hygiene, such as leading an active life or exercising regularly. These little or simple things that are done consistently are efficient ways of doing self-care,” she said.

According to the group, the basis of selfcare must include right and trustworthy information; science; and [embedding self-care practices in our] culture. Self-care must also be part of our education, so that children will grow up knowing the right concept of it, and more importantly, including it in their practice. And for our part, as Filipinos, not feeling guilty about it. Certainly, there are gaps that need to be filled in to ensure that Filipinos’ understanding of self-care is rooted in science.

“Apart from the fact that many Filipinos don’t want to do self-care and would rather just wait for them to feel better later, we also say that self-care is selfish. And that we feel guilty of taking care of ourselves first because a lot of people need our attention. The truth is, we need to take care of ourselves first so we can better take care of others. So, I think this is one of the gaps. We need to correct that --because self-care is healthy,” enthused Gosiengfiao.

“Another thing, we need to Increase health care literacy. It must start among the young, in their education. I think all of us here have been educated about proper hygiene, proper nutrition, exercise, and rest — these are all important,” Gosiengfiao carried on.

Self-care is holistic. It is not just about having a much-needed metime, but it is part of it. And everyone should practice it. Regardless of gender and status in life – we all need to practice self-care. Let’s all be kind to ourselves. As they say, when our cup is filled with love and care for ourselves, then we have something more to give to others.