

Saving women's hearts

The Philippine Heart Association's *Mabuhay Ka Pusong Pinay!* advocacy aims to give women the same attention as men

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It is not true that only men are at risk for cardiovascular diseases. Women are just as prone to heart disease, only they are less aware that they have it and they tend to be less concerned about their heart health.

The problem with women is that they seem to take a step backward when it comes to their health, says Dr. Ma. Belen Carisma, president of the Philippine Heart Association (PHA). They tend to prioritize more the health of their family.

"Women seem to take the backseat, most especially when it comes to their cardiovascular health," points out Carisma. "Usually, a woman would come to the hospital accompanying her husband who's experiencing difficulty breathing. Even if the woman is not feeling well, she would ignore it and put first her husband."

These pretty much sum up the rationale for the PHA's latest advocacy, *Mabuhay Ka Pusong Pinay!*, which aims to heighten awareness about cardiovascular disease among women, empower them, and encourage them to lead healthy lifestyles.

Cardiovascular diseases are the top killers of Filipino women, according to 2004 data from the National Statistics Office. Together they account 32 percent of total deaths among women.

Notes Carisma: "Heart disease is the number one killer of women over 25 years old. Two in every five women will die of heart disease or stroke."

"Women feel the symptoms and see the



FOR WOMEN'S SAKE

Drs. Esperanza Cabral, Belen Carisma, and Milagros Yamamoto lead a toast to women's heart health at the unveiling of the *Mabuhay Ka Pusong Pinay!* campaign logo.

signs, but opt to ignore them to give way to their husbands," echoes Dr. Milagros Yamamoto, chair of the PHA Council on women's cardiovascular health. "Lack of awareness about the risks of heart diseases is a factor," she points out.

Yamamoto says women are also prone to die from cardiovascular diseases, especially those in their menopausal stage and those who are obese. Women who have a body-mass index of 25 to 29.9 have a 20.5-percent risk in having cardiovascular diseases. Those who lack physical activity have a 66.3-percent chance of having heart disease.

Cigarette smoking, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, dyslipidemia, sedentary lifestyle, and arterogenic diet are among the risk factors for heart disease.

Preventing heart disease begins with lifestyle change, according to Yamamoto. One reason for the high prevalence of heart disease is the so-called "western lifestyle," which when combined with stress, smoking, obesity, and other risk factors puts women in danger.

"Women nowadays are more career-oriented [than] before when majority of them were just plain housewives," notes Yamamoto. "They now share responsibilities with their husbands in providing financial support to their family, thus there's an increase in stress levels and if you add it with the other factors, chances are they will become more prone to having cardiovascular diseases," she says.

Mabuhay Ka Pusong Pinay! was launched

in a series of activities that culminated with the Plate it for Women's Sake, a fund-raising-dinner-cum-entertainment event at the Manila Polo Club.

The directors, officers, and staff of PHA served as waiters, waitresses, bartenders, and valet attendants of guests during the event. Paolo Bediones and Dr. Ma. Adelaida Iboleon-Dy served as the night's masters of ceremonies.

It was a night full of beautiful ladies in red gowns and men in suits who all came to support the advocacy. The Baihana band serenaded the guests while dinner was being served. Some members and officers of the PHA showcased their talents with Carisma leading the pack with her rumba number.

Keynoting the night, Dr. Secretary Esperanza Cabral, social welfare and development secretary, congratulated the PHA for leading the fight against cardiovascular diseases and putting women's heart health among its priorities.

"Cardiovascular disease is serious business for women. Empowered women will start to view heart disease as a priority and not just a male health issue," said the former PHA president.

Carisma and the members of the PHA council on women's cardiovascular health unveiled the logo of the *Mabuhay Ka Pusong Pinay!* campaign. The red dress pin, created by Filipino designer Rajo Laurel, symbolizes the empowered Filipino woman. **M**