

The Pediatric Radiology Journey of Northern Mindanao, Philippines: Insights and Experiences

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“It is not yet time.” Too often, we try to rationalize situations that do not happen in our favor or meet our expectations with this statement. Some go as far as accepting that “it was not meant to be.” Such was the case back in February 2020 when I had the opportunity to apply for the World Federation of Pediatric Imaging (WFPI) Observership Program [1] through the encouragement of my residency training officer, Dr. Roel Dilao, who introduced me to Prof. Bernard Laya - the country program coordinator. In the following month, the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic gripped the world and effectively postponed the applications for the program indefinitely. I thought, probably, it was not meant to be as the whole world was in a chokehold by a virus. It would take a two-year waiting period for the situation to normalize and the program to reopen.

I decided to apply after some soul-searching and knowing deep down I wanted to go into Pediatric Radiology. Thankfully, I was accepted into the said program for the Philippines. Prof. Laya and Dr. Nathan Concepcion, together with the entire St. Luke’s Medical Center (SLMC) - Pediatric Radiology group (Fig. 1), gave me a warm welcome and offered to upgrade it further into a full fellowship, which I graciously accepted. I would go on to learn the intricacies of how to handle and approach pediatric imaging cases as well as realizing its uniqueness from adult imaging. I truly grasped the idea that children are definitely not small adults. We handled multiple pediatric imaging procedures daily and would come across one or two cases that would challenge us to read and study more. The routine cases also helped us master the techniques and protocols, which increased my confidence further along the way (Fig. 2).

Fig. 1 The St. Luke’s Medical Center - Pediatric Radiology group (from right to left): Dr. Karl Josef Solidum, Dr. Marvin Bautista, Dr. Nathan David Concepcion, Prof. Bernard Laya, Dr. Mariaem Andres, Dr. Maricar Reyes, Dr. Jacqueline Austine Uy and Dr. Odina Gomez



Fig. 2 The author performing cranial ultrasound under the guidance of his mentor (not shown)



It was a dream come true. My days in training made me realize that the long wait was worth it. At the same time, I felt validated that this path I chose was indeed intended for me. The surprising thing was that it also became the path for my community. My practice is centered in Northern Mindanao, Philippines, which has a population of more than 5 million, wherein roughly 40% [2,3] of which are children, with no prior pediatric radiologist serving the area. With the guidance of my mentors, we were able to immediately impact the local community. A mere four months into my training, I was given the opportunity to share my learnings in pediatric radiology with the local radiologists through our organized chapter (Fig. 3). Key topics such as Image Gently were introduced

Fig. 3 The author giving a lecture for his local society of radiologists sharing his experiences and interesting cases gained from the World Federation of Pediatric Imaging (WFPI) observership



for the first time, which became an eye-opener to many. Monthly webinars prepared by the SLMC - Pediatric Radiology group were also shared with my local colleagues, which improved their understanding of important pediatric imaging topics such as white matter diseases and foreign bodies. Even after finishing the training program, my community is still reaping its benefits. We were able to produce a post-graduate course (Fig. 4) dedicated to both pediatricians and radiologists of

Fig. 4 Prof. Laya (center), the author (to his right) and Dr. Concepcion (to his left) together with the organizers and attendees of the 1st Pediatric Radiology post-graduate course held in Northern Mindanao, Philippines. The first of many scheduled lecture series all over the archipelago



Northern Mindanao, the first of its kind, and one that strengthened the partnership of doctors involved in the care of children. On a personal note, I was also given the opportunity to be a speaker at the Philippine Society for Pediatric Radiology mini-session during the Philippine College of Radiology Annual Convention discussing my research project done during fellowship training (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5 The author delivering his keynote presentation during the Philippine College of Radiology annual convention held February 2023



A lot has happened in just the past 12 months and I always find it amusing that we have accomplished so much for the country in the advancement of Pediatric Radiology, more so in the area of my practice. I have nothing but gratitude to WFPI and the *William Shields* Memorial Foundation [1] for giving me an opportunity to carve my own path in this subspecialty while being ably guided by the greatest mentors in the country. I am beyond blessed to have met the likes of Prof. Laya, Dr. Concepcion, the rest of the SLMC - Pediatric Radiology group and their international counterparts, whom most have served as my inspiration in the pursuit of this craft. To paraphrase one of the biggest movie franchises, “the mission, if one should accept,” is to image gently one child at a time. A mission I have wholeheartedly accepted and hopefully inspire more to do the same (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6 The author guiding the local radiology residents on how to perform ultrasound with special emphasis on pediatric imaging



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