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Health officials get closer look into Cuba's healthcare system

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The Department of Health (DOH) is now coming up with proposals on how health care practices in Cuba can be carried out in the country.

Philippine health officials led by health secretary Paulyn Ubial visited Cuba from August 23-26 to study its healthcare system.

Cuba's government-run health care system is well-recognized worldwide for its efficiency.

The DOH team had the opportunity to consult with their Cuban counterparts and visit healthcare facilities there.

"We went to the Ministry of Health, the Family Physician's Office- that's the most frontline facility, their multidisciplinary outpatient clinic, their tertiary hospital facilities, as well as other support facilities like a mental health unit, maternity waiting home for high-risk pregnant women, and also geriatric home," Ubial said during a briefing in Malacañang.

## **Human resource and mental health unit**

Ubial said the Philippines needs to address challenges in producing an adequate number of health professionals.

She said the country needs to triple the number of doctors in rural areas and primary clinics in order to carry out a universal healthcare system similar to Cuba's.

"In the Cuban model, their school of medicine is under the Ministry of Health. So they are able to produce medical graduates that are attuned to their health agenda. For us, we have only five state-owned colleges of medicine and our production is not that many. In fact, even our board exam passers for medicine is about 30-40%, in Cuba its 98%," the DOH chief explained.

In Cuba, Ubial said the doctor-patient ratio is one (doctor): 1,075 (population).

This is far from the Philippines' current doctor-patient ratio of one (doctor): 33,000 (population).

Ubial said the ideal is to have one doctor per barangay, but what we currently have is one doctor per municipality, which covers 20-30 barangays.

"We are actually in the process of calculating what is feasible, like in the interim maybe one midwife per two barangay then move on until in the six year period of the president probably address one doctor per a number of barangays," said Ubial.

The health department is also interested in copying Cuba's community-based mental health services.

"In Cuba, they don't have mental institutions. All their patients are outpatient. It's delivering services at home," Ubial added.

Ubial said it would cost at least \$57 billion to replicate Cuba's healthcare practices.

President Rodrigo Duterte, in his first State of the Nation Address, [promised to provide universal health insurance](#) for all Filipinos.

And during his first Cabinet meeting, the President instructed Ubial to take a trip to Cuba and learn how they are running their healthcare system.

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