

ACADEMY NEWS

Eye doctors urged to get out of comfort zones

SOCIAL welfare and development secretary Corazon "Dinky" Soliman has called on Filipino ophthalmologists to help bring not just good eyesight but hope to people who need it most and in the process help fuel a much-needed "national transformation."

Keynoting the opening session of the annual meeting of the Philippine Academy of Ophthalmology (PAO) on November 18, Sec. Soliman urged members of the PAO to think of their work not just in terms of providing eye care but also of helping people see "the possibilities to make our [national] vision come true." "As eye doctors you can help [bring about] a compassionate society and articulate our vision of transformation for our country," she said.

Stressing that the ophthalmology profession cannot be isolated from the rest of society, the former nongovernment organization leader asked ophthalmologists and other medical professionals to help bring about a corruption-free government, deliver basic social services to all citi-

zens, and make justice reign in the country.

"We must all help in seeing the potentials in our country and not be blind to the needs of our own people," she said even as she called attention to what she called a "doctor deficit" prevailing in many parts of the country.

Sec. Soliman was referring to the overseas exodus of Filipino doctors and other health workers in search of financial stability, which has aggravated the dearth of health-care services especially in the rural areas.

"We have a doctor deficit especially in rural areas, [owing in part to the] government's inability to give competitive salaries for professionals in the medical profession," she said, noting that a government doctor receives roughly PhP15,000 a month while a Filipino nurse working in the United States gets as much as P200,000 a month—"which is why we have doctors training to become nurses."

Sec. Soliman noted that one rarely finds a doctor—especially an eye doctor—in the rural areas on a regular

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basis, which is one of the reasons why vision impairment is also common in the rural areas.

She said the most common eye disease of the poor is corneal blindness due to infection. "Obviously the infection comes from the polluted environment that we have and the lack of knowledge on how to care for the eyes—because eye care is the least available health care in the rural areas," she explained.

She commended PAO for its commitment to encourage its members "to remain in the country and provide health-care services where they are at the moment."

Said Sec. Soliman: "This is the challenge for eye doctors. Each one of us is called upon to serve—to move out of our comfort zones, to move out of what is familiar, and go to the places you think are dangerous, where you might think people will not accept you or people will harm you."

In opening the convention, Dr. Marcelino Banzon, PAO president, spoke of the same challenge. Said he: "Let me challenge all of us to do our share, to get out once in a while from our comfort zones, do charity work, and give back and share to society the blessings we have been given."

"My community, my responsibility remains our battle cry," he said. "The prevention of childhood blindness is our moral and social responsibility as eye specialists. It is also our commitment to help in the international community's efforts in fighting remediable blindness worldwide," he added.

The meeting, which had *Look the Future in the Eye* for its theme, focused on "pediatric ophthalmology and strabismus in a global perspective."

"Children are our hope, our future. But their future looks bleak," said Dr. Banzon, noting that about 1.5 million children worldwide are blind, one million of them in Asia. He said nearly half of these could have been prevented with proper ophthalmic care. In the Philippines, children below 15 years of age make up 37 percent of the population. Among them, the prevalence of blindness 0.9 per 1,000.

"An estimated 100 children lose their sight every week" because of causes that are preventable like poor nutrition, measles, and premature birth, lamented Dr. Banzon.

To help address the problems, the PAO and the Philippine Pediatric Society have joined hands for a vision-screening program for children so that vision problems can be addressed early. During the convention, the two societies issued a Joint Policy Statement on Retinopathy of Prematurity Screening, which came on the heels of the PPS Policy Statement on Pediatric Blindness Prevention and Vision Screening.

These are meant to boost the Elimination of Avoidable Childhood Blindness Project launched in 2003 and the Five-Year Strategic Plan for Vision 20/20 launched in August 2004 to bring down the national blindness prevalence rate to less than 0.5 percent in five years.

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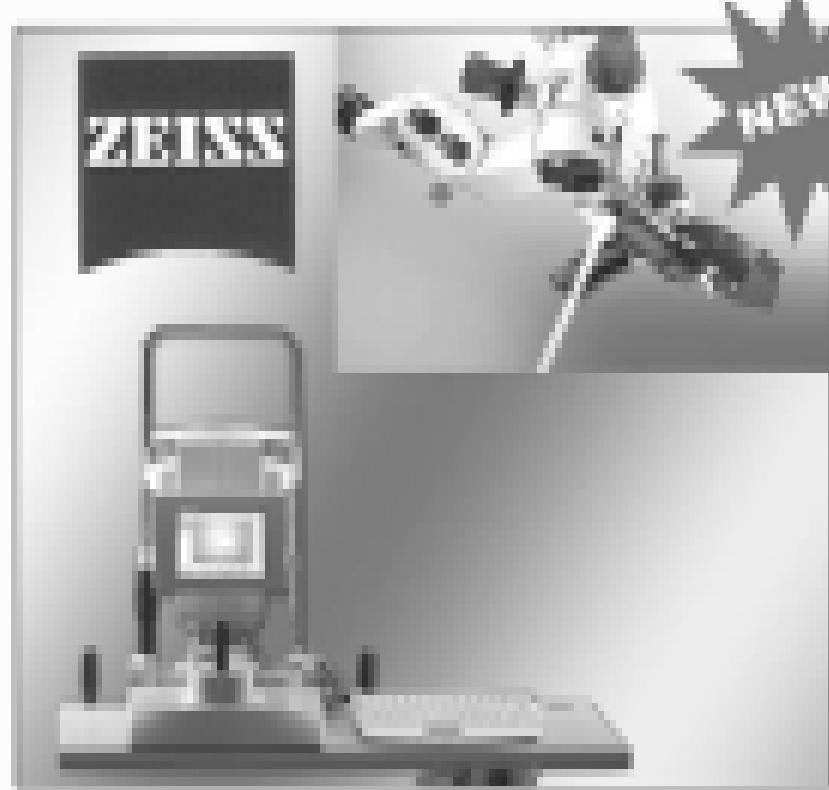
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10. *Leucania* *luteola* (Hufnagel) (Fig. 10)

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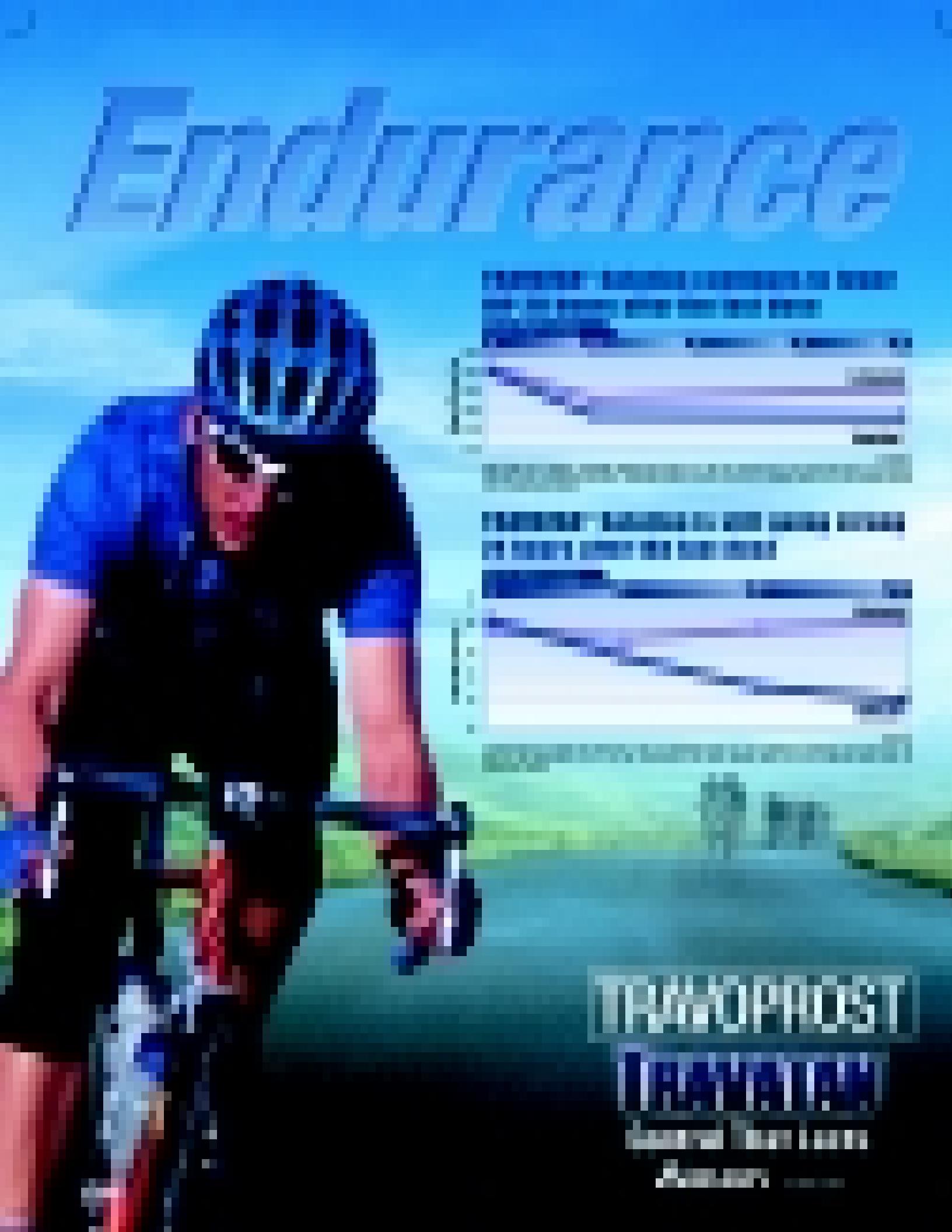
11. *Leucosia* *leucostoma* (Fabricius) *leucostoma* (Fabricius) *leucostoma* (Fabricius)

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1996-1997: The first year of the new millennium, the year of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, and the year of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

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