

Fe Primitiva Villanueva del Mundo (pediatrician)

(November 27, 1911 -August 6, 2011)



Dr. Fe Primitiva Villanueva del Mundo opened the first pediatric hospital in the Philippines and is credited for shaping the modern child healthcare system in the Philippines. She graduated as class valedictorian from the College of Medicine at the University of the Philippines in 1933 and was awarded “The Most Outstanding Scholar in Medicine” by the Colegio Medico-Farmaceutico de Filipinas. She completed graduate work at Harvard Medical School through an appointment at Boston Children’s Hospital. She spent three years of her postgraduate studies at Boston’s Children’s Hospital and Harvard Medical School, then one year at the University of Chicago and 6 months at John Hopkins Hospital. In 1980, she became the first woman to be declared as a National Scientist of the Philippines.

Her science journey began when Fe Primitiva del Mundo was born in Intramuros, Manila on November 27, 1911. She was one of eight children of Bernardo del Mundo, a prominent lawyer from Marinduque, Philippines and his wife Paz Villanueva del Mundo. Bernardo served one term in the Philippines Assembly representing the province of Tayabas. Three of Fe’s siblings died in infancy while an older sister died from appendicitis at the age of 11 years. When her younger sister Elisa died, Fe decided that she would continue her sister’s desire to be a doctor for the poor. So she enrolled in the University of the Philippines College of



Medicine. She graduated as class valedictorian in 1933 and placed third in the medical board exam. Her exposure to various health conditions afflicting children in the provinces, particularly in Marinduque, led her to choose pediatrics as her specialization. She went abroad for postgraduate studies. In 1940, she was an Assistant Physician at Boston

Children's Hospital and a Research Fellow in Pediatrics. She spent three years of her postgraduate studies at Boston's Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School, then one year at the University of Chicago and 6 months at John Hopkins Hospital. She also enrolled at the Boston University School of Medicine and received a master's degree in Bacteriology in 1940.

When World War II began, she had a choice: stay in the United States where she would be safe, or go back to the Philippines where her work as a pediatrician was badly needed. She had promised to fulfill her sister's dream; and so she went back to the Philippines. On December 8, 1941, Japanese military forces entered Manila and forced American, British, and other foreign civilians - men, women, and children - to go to the University of Santo Tomas internment camp. But also some

children were left behind with maids and friends. Fe asked the International Red Cross for help: she wanted to bring the children to the Red Cross facilities. Then she asked the Japanese military officials to let her remove the children from the muddy camp of Santo Tomas. On January 10, 1942, Fe opened the Children's Home in the Red Cross Building. What started as 17 children grew, and soon the building was overcrowded. Fe moved the



Children's Home to the Sisters of the Holy Ghost College which had a large playground. The Holy Ghost College was closer to the University of Santo Tomas internment camp where the children's parents were interned. Soon there were 130 children in the Children's Home. It grew to include pregnant women and mothers with infants. The staff provided health care and hot meals and organized holiday celebrations to distract the children from the war. Parents who were at the internment camp were allowed to visit their children. Fe became known as the "Angel of Santo Tomas".

In February 1943, the Japanese military authorities took over the Children's Home. Manila Mayor Leon Guinto asked Fe to head a children's hospital under the auspices of the city government. The hospital was later converted into a full-care medical center to help take care of the casualties during the "Battle of Manila", fought by Filipino and American forces against the Japanese army in 1945. The Center would be renamed the North General Hospital. (Later it was renamed again; it is now called the Jose R. Reyes Memorial Medical Center.) Fe would remain the director of the North General Hospital until 1948. She joined the faculty of the College of Medicine of the University of Santo Tomas and then later joined the faculty of the Far Eastern University in 1954. She became the head of the Department of Pediatrics at the Far Eastern University - Nicanor Reyes Medical Foundation for more than 20 years. In the 1950s, she established a small pediatric clinic for her private practice.

CHILDREN'S MEDICAL CENTER FOUNDATION



In 1957, Fe sold her house and obtained a loan from the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) to establish her own pediatric hospital. She had been increasingly frustrated with the bureaucratic constraints of working for a government hospital. The Children's Medical Center, a 107-

bed hospital located in Quezon City, a suburb of Manila, became the first pediatric hospital in the Philippines. In 1966, it was expanded through the establishment of

an Institute of Maternal and Child Health, an institution that trains doctors and nurses, the first institution of its kind in Asia. The Children's Medical Center was later renamed to the Dr. Fe Del Mundo Medical Center. Fe lived on the second floor of the Children's Medical Center and continued making early morning rounds until she was 99 years old.

Fe was also a pioneer in treating infectious diseases in the Philippines. Because of lack of well-equipped laboratories after World War II, she sent specimens of blood samples for analysis abroad. In the 1950's she studied dengue fever, a common illness in the Philippines caused by mosquitoes. Her clinical observations and research findings led to a better understanding of how dengue fever affects young children. She authored over a hundred articles on dengue fever, polio, and measles.

When Fe established the Children's Medical Center Foundation, she transformed pediatric care in the Philippines. The foundation saved thousands of children by establishing family planning clinics and treating children with poor nutrition and dehydration. She wrote the book "Textbook of Pediatrics and Child Health", a fundamental textbook used in medical schools in the Philippines. In 1981, she and other committee members of the First International Congress Organizing Committee wrote the "*Proceedings of the First International Congress on Maternal and Neonatal Health*" which became the book *Primary Maternal and Neonatal Health a Global Concern*. In her own words, on the Preface of the book, Fe talked about the increasing interest and concern for women and children during the vulnerable period around birth. She said that millions of women every year suffer serious complications during pregnancy. The International Association of Maternal and Neonatal Health (IAMANEH) was convened in Manila, Philippines on November 2-7, 1981 and was attended by experts from 25 countries. Speakers talked about a) interrelations between maternal and neonatal health and family planning b) future aspects of the family planning program c) prevention and cure of prevalent infections in the mother and newborn d) monitoring of maternal and neonatal health within and outside clinical settings e) strategies for implementation of recent knowledge and technology relative to maternal and neonatal health within primary health care.

Fe was active in public health, with special concerns towards mothers and children living in the rural areas. She organized rural extension teams to advise mothers on



breastfeeding and childcare. She promoted the idea of linking hospitals to the community through the public immersion of physicians and other medical personnel. She thought that this would allow for greater coordination among health workers and the public for common health programs such as immunization and nutrition. She invented the world's first bamboo incubator, keeping premature babies warm by nestling one basket inside another and tucking heated bottles between them. She

designed these bamboo incubators for rural communities without electrical power. She is also credited with inventing a jaundice relieving device. These inventions e.g. the bamboo incubator, jaundice relievers, and the BRAT (banana, rice, apple, tea) diet for curing diarrhea have spread throughout the world and saved millions.

Fe died on August 6, 2011 of cardiac arrest. She was buried at the Libingan ng mga Bayani (Heroes Cemetery) in the Philippines.

HER LEGACY

In 1947, Fe became the first Filipino certified by the American Board of Pediatrics as Board Diplomat.

In 1966, she received the Elizabeth Blackwell award given by Hobart and William Smith Colleges to distinguished women 'whose life exemplifies outstanding service to humanity'

She edited and contributed to the Textbook of Pediatrics and Child Health in 1976.

She was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award, Asia's equivalent of the Nobel Peace Prize for her lifelong dedication as a physician extraordinary to needy Filipino children.

She founded the first pediatric hospital in the Philippines called Children's Memorial Hospital in Quezon City, a suburb of Manila.



In 1980, she became the first woman declared as a National Scientist of the Philippines.

In 2002 the Children's Medical Center was renamed the Fe Del Mundo Medical Center.

She was awarded the Blessed Teresa of Calcutta Award from the AY Foundation.

Among other achievements, she was the president of the Medical Women's International Association; the first female president of the Philippine Pediatric Society; an honorary member of the American Pediatric Society; and a consultant of the World Health Organization. She has been honored with the 15th International Congress of Pediatrics award as most outstanding pediatrician and humanitarian.

A Google doodle was made for her on her 107th birthday in 2018.



Videos about Fe del Mundo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVyH6skgKh4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dA-Dqy5uZrA>

HER SCIENCE JOURNEY

1911 - Fe Primitiva del Mundo was born in Intramuros, Manila

1933 - Graduated class valedictorian at the University of the Philippines College of Medicine. Placed third in the Medical Board Examination.

1940 - Received a master's degree in Bacteriology from the Boston University School of Medicine

1941 - Fe returned to the Philippines from the US

1942 - Japanese military forces enter Manila and 5000 American, British and other foreign civilians and their families forced into the University of Santo Tomas internment camp

1943 - Fe opened the Children's Home

1945 - University of Santo Tomas internment camp was liberated

1947 - Fe became the first Filipino certified by the American Board of Pediatrics as Board Diplomat

1954 - She became the head of the Department of Pediatrics at the Far Eastern University - Nicanor Reyes Medical Foundation

1957 - Built the Children's Memorial Center, first pediatric hospital in the Philippines

1966 – Established the Institute of Maternal and Child Health

- Received the Elizabeth Blackwell Award

1976 - Edited and contributed to the *Textbook of Pediatrics and Child Health*

1977 - Received the Ramon Magsaysay Award, Asia's equivalent of the Nobel Peace Prize

1980 - Became the first woman declared as a National Scientist of the Philippines

2002 - Children's Memorial Center renamed the Fe del Mundo Medical Center.

2008- Received the Blessed Teresa of Calcutta Award

2010 - Received the Order of Lakandula with the rank of *Bayani* from the President of the Philippines Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

2011- Fe died of cardiac arrest and was buried at the Libingan ng mga Bayani (Heroes Cemetery) in the Philippines

- Posthumously awarded the Grand Collar of the Order of the Golden Heart Award

2018 – Google honored her with a doodle on her 107th birthday

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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2. Del Mundo, Fe, Cuyegkeng, Elena Ines and Aviado, Domingo. *Primary Maternal and Neonatal Health A Global Concern*. New York: Plenum Press, 1983.

The photos and some of the information came from these websites:

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<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39347137/>

https://www.hws.edu/about/history/elizabeth-blackwell/award/del_mundo.aspx

<https://www.cureus.com/articles/289632-dr-fe-del-mundo-the-pioneer-who-transformed-pediatrics-and-child-healthcare-in-the-philippines#!/>