



Dr. Fe del Mundo is flanked by her former students, Drs. Farida and Philip Chua.

An international giant in medicine, petite Fe del Mundo, M.D., who had touched countless lives in the Philippines and around the world, died in her sleep Aug. 6, 2011.

She was more than 99 years old, actually less than three months shy of 100. She had always aimed for the pinnacle and excelled in every turn, even among her medical peers, in her career and life, and now, even in longevity and death.

Dr. del Mundo was born on Nov. 27, 1911, in Manila.

Her family home was right across the Manila Cathedral.

She was christened Fe.

Nobody knew that she was to be a legend in medicine, the children's angel "of the world," as her name suggests.

Fittingly, she was interred at the Libingan ng mga Bayani.

After all, she was, indeed, a hero to millions of children around the world for more than seven decades.

This phenomenal lady physician was married only to her lifetime care of sick children and never had a family of her own.

She practiced pediatrics up to her ripe old age of 94, most of time from her wheelchair since three years before.

She was the champion of children's care and refused to abandon them as long as she could, to the day her mental faculty and physical capacity left her.

My wife, Farida, and I were privileged to be among her students in pediatrics in the medical school in the mid-50s.

She was already a renowned figure in medicine then, famous for her BRAT diet for the management of diarrhea.

Brat, of course, stands for a spoiled child.

The acronym she devised stood for banana, rice, apple sauce and toast, or extended to BRATT, by adding tea.

After she introduced that simple and effective treatment diet, it spread across the globe and was soon adapted by physicians, especially pediatricians, around the world, as “Dr. Fe del Mundo’s BRAT diet,” published in medical literature and textbooks in pediatrics in many countries.

Farida was so inspired by this great physician, she later became a pediatrician herself in Chicago in the late 60s.

Very few physicians lived to practice their medical career for half a century, much less for 75 years.

But this one grand lady was an exception.

Dr. del Mundo, an academician, was also a national scientist, researcher, hospital administrator and medical leader.

She broke every record among her peers in the medical school, during her residency training, in medical practice, and in medical politics, here and abroad.

She was a well-recognized and a most decorated physician.

She was, indeed, an exceptional woman.

Dr. Fe del Mundo graduated in 1933 as the “Most Outstanding Scholar in Medicine,” a valedictorian at the University of the Philippines College of Medicine.

She traveled to the United States with a fellowship grant from the Commonwealth of the Philippines, completing pediatric courses A, B and C at Harvard Medical College in 1937, earning an M.A. degree in bacteriology from Boston University in 1940.

She had also enrolled at the famous Billings Hospital of the University of Chicago.

She was a physician of superior intellect, a lady with many “firsts.”

She was the first Filipino woman, and the first female, to be accepted to train at the Harvard Medical School.

She was erroneously assigned to an all-male dormitory, the only rose among the thorns, and there too, she also excelled.

After her training in the United States, she returned home and established the Children’s Memorial Hospital on Banawe, Quezon City, in 1957, the first pediatric hospital in the Philippines.

Her “baby,” this hospital was later renamed Fe del Mundo Medical Center Foundation, where she had been the hospital president and chief pediatrician since its inception, more than half her life.

Dr. del Mundo was chairman of pediatrics at the Far Eastern University, and founder of Children's Home in Manila and the Institute of Maternal and Child Health.

She was the first Filipino diplomate of the American Board of Pediatrics, the first lady president of the Philippine Pediatric Society, the founder and first president of the Philippine Woman's Medical Association, the first woman to be elected president of the Philippine Medical Association in its 65-year history, and the first Asian to be voted president of the Medical Woman's International Association.

Dr. del Mundo had received countless awards, some of which were the Elizabeth Blackwell Award as a Woman Doctor of World Renown; Most Outstanding Woman in Medicine, International Federation of Women Lawyers; Distinguished Pediatrician and Humanitarian Award, International Pediatric Association; Honorary Doctorate in Science, Women's Medical College of Philadelphia and the Smith College, USA; and the Ramon Magsaysay Award for the public service.

Many of Dr. del Mundo's early pediatric patients are now great-grandmothers themselves, giving her the joy of having ministered to four generations of countless families.

Her tremendous lifetime accomplishments, honors, awards, recognitions, and accolades since her medical schooling in the late 1920s and early 30s are unparalleled.

The family of Dr. del Mundo has been informed that President Benigno Aquino III had been planning on bestowing on Dr. del Mundo the Grand Collar of the Order of the Golden Heart, the highest honor in this Order.

Our admiration, pride, love and reverence for this great mentor of ours had grown over the years as we got reconnected with her in Chicago in the 90s, after which we started visiting her at her hospital on Banawe, where she lived to the day she died.

I once asked Dr. del Mundo, when she was 91, her secret formula for maintaining her weight, health and longevity, and she quickly replied with a smile, "I push myself away from the table

less than full.”

I have since quoted her often in my health columns, medical seminars, and in my forthcoming book this September 2011, Let's Stop "Killing" Our Children.

To honor her on her 99th birthday last year, a coffee table book, entitled Fe del Mundo: a Beautiful Life, which chronicled and immortalized her teachings and lifetime achievements, was "presented" to her.

Our beloved mentor has left this world, but she left it a lot better place than she found it, for children and parents alike, for a prouder nation and people, who are all greatly indebted to her.

We will all miss Dr. Fe del Mundo, but her beautiful life and legacy will live on in the heart of the countless lives she had touched during her wonderful journey of almost a century in our world.

What a grand visit!

We bid Dr. Fe del Mundo farewell.

May she walk with God and enjoy eternal rest, which she so richly deserves.

(Editor's note: Philip S. Chua, M.D., FACS, FPCS, is cardiac surgeon emeritus in Northwest Indiana and a columnist of this paper. He is chairman of the Filipino United Network - USA, a 501(c)(3) United States Foundation, an advocacy for good governance and responsible citizenship. His e-mail address is scalpelpen@gmail.com).