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VCO clinical trial in PGH might start this week: DOST chief

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(Photo grabbed from DOST Secretary Fortunato dela Peña's Facebook page)

MANILA – The clinical trial to see virgin coconut oil's (VCO) effectiveness in coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) patients' recovery at the UP-Philippine General Hospital (PGH) might start this week, Department of Science and Technology (DOST) Secretary Fortunato dela Peña said Tuesday.

During the Palace virtual presser, dela Peña mentioned several DOST-supported projects or initiatives related to the fight against Covid-19, such as the community-based VCO clinical trial being conducted at the Santa Rosa Community Hospital in Laguna.

He said 30 out of the target 90 patients have enrolled in the clinical trial in Laguna.

In this clinical trial, VCO will be included in their three meals. Half of the participants would be provided with VCO to compare the performance with the other 45 individuals who would not be given VCO.

Dela Peña said the planned VCO clinical trial at the PGH, aimed at patients with severe cases, has not yet begun.

"It took time to get the approval of the UP Manila Ethics Board. They (researchers) had to make modifications in the project, following the suggestions of the Ethics Board. The changes in the project had to be approved by the PCHRD (Philippine Council for Health Research and Development)," he told the Philippine News Agency (PNA).

Those involved in the project also had a memorandum of agreement with the Philippine Coconut Authority for the supply of unbranded VCO, dela Peña said.

"They assured me they can start this week at PGH," he said.

For the other initiatives using natural products, dela Peña said during the virtual presser that the DOST is still waiting for the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) approval for clinical trials using lagundi and tawa-tawa.

Earlier, he said the project aims to determine if lagundi, as adjuvant therapy, could provide symptomatic relief for mild Covid-19 patients without co-morbidities.

It also aims to determine if lagundi could decrease the number of patients who progress from mild to moderate or severe cases.

Dela Peña noted that lagundi is known to be used as a treatment for cough and that tawa-tawa increases blood platelet count.

"Both have antiviral properties," he said, citing the DOST's

desire to explore various treatments that could help treat Covid-19 patients.

Another project, which dela Peña said would start soon, is the clinical trial on the use of high-dose melatonin as a supplementary treatment for Covid-19 patients with pneumonia and high-risk features.

The project would run for four months for patients confined at the Manila Doctors Hospital (MDH).

It was approved by the DOST in June for a budget of PHP9.8 million.

Dela Peña said this project has not yet received a go signal from the FDA but doctors are already recruiting patients for the study.

(PNA)