



Most Outstanding Alumnus for Community Service

PATRICIO A. SONZA, MD
Class 1973

Patricio Aguillon Sonza was born in New Lucena, Iloilo on March 17, 1945. He was one of nine children and his parents raised him and his siblings in a humble but loving family. Community was at the heart of their upbringing. He attended the local schools until he went to college in Iloilo City at the University of San Agustin. In 1964, Pat became among the university's first graduates of Medical Technology, which was then a new department. He worked as a registered medical technologist in Chicago, Illinois for several years, before returning to Manila to begin medical school at University of Santo Tomas.

In 1973, he graduated and embarked on his internship at V. Luna Medical Center in Quezon City, Philippines. For six months afterwards, he performed rural medical service, required by the Philippine government, in San Leonard, Nueva Ecija. Soon, Pat was recruited by the government of Iran to practice general medicine in Tehran, where he spent close to two years practicing. This was the foundation of his global experience of providing medical care. In 1978, he went to the United States to start residency. He became a surgical resident at Saint Mary's Hospital, an affiliated hospital of the Yale University School of Medicine. This three-year surgical residency program included a six-month rotation at Memorial Sloan Kettering – Cancer Center in New York City. After completing three years of surgical residency, Pat decided to shift his practice to Anesthesia. In 1981, he began an anesthesia residency program at Saint Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston, New Jersey. After this residency, he became an anesthesiologist in private practice at Hunterdon Medical Center in Flemington, New Jersey. He practiced from 1983 until 2008. During this period, Pat and his wife raised two daughters in Hunterdon County, New Jersey where they currently still reside.

When he retired from private practice, Pat volunteered for Medecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders. He traveled to South Sudan, Nigeria, and the Philippines to volunteer and went on many missions from 2009 until 2014. This experience opened up his perspective on humanitarian needs. Pat had always been aware and responsive to the needs of poverty-stricken communities, ones that he himself had lived and experienced as a child. But his work with Medecins Sans Frontières added a new dimension to his personal and professional understanding of the disparities in health care. Pat performed general, obstetrical, and pediatric anesthesia. Some of the missions were in war-torn environments and Pat often provided medical care with a team of providers in very challenging conditions using only essential medical equipment. There were the threats of terrorists such as Boko Haram, extreme heat, disease, and other dangers. It was a truly humbling experience to witness such abject poverty and extreme violence that people had to suffer through. But Pat was proud to be part of the solution. In 2014, his last mission allowed him to come full circle when he was offered the chance to serve in Tacloban, Philippines, during the aftermath of the tsunami called Hurricane Yolanda.

CREAM OF THE CROP