As health conscious individuals, we’ve been down this road before. The Swine Flu Pandemic scare is déjà vu. Nonetheless, we face the same challenges related to patient education, health advocation through disease prevention, appropriate treatment and unveiling the truth about what’s really happening.

In light of our current challenge perpetrated by the “fear-mongering”, media frenzy over Swine Flu, I share the following points:

(1) First in 2008, sales of Tamiflu, the leader in anti-viral treatment for influenza, fell by 68% from 2007. It is interesting to note that most of the 2007 Tamiflu sales resulted from pandemic stockpiling contracts with worldwide governments from 2004 – 2006, when the “Bird Flu” scare ran rampant. In the absence of a materialized pandemic, worldwide stockpiles of Tamiflu have totaled 220 million doses as of January 2009; leaving no need for significant purchases in 2008.

(2) Second, Chugai Pharmaceutical Co., LTD of Japan (with 51% of its shares owned by Hoffman-LaRoche) forecasted a 531% increase in Tamiflu sales for FY2009 in its 2008 report. This forecast was based on the company’s expectation of “resumption of government stockpiling in FY2009 and on-going recovery of the prescription rate for swine influenza”.

Is there a possible connection between the pharmaceutical company’s revenue projections and the media’s willingness to overwhelm the public with excessive, half-truth reporting? Unfortunately mass media thrive on dramatizing and exaggerating negative news. They are particularly thrilled when their efforts to “spin” information succeed at causing public fear and confusion.

I believe an outbreak of any novel virus such as H1N1, should be contained by pandemic prevention initiatives, while the public is kept informed and given adequate prevention and treatment information. However, I do not support creating unnecessary fear, alarm and paranoia which undermine rational thinking and behavior. So how do we take better care of our patients during a stressful time such as this one?

I suggest we remain level-headed and ask our patients to do the same. Let’s remind them of the following:

- As in the cases of BIRD FLU, EBOLA VIRUS, SARS, etc., there will be no specific prevention or cure made available for SWINE FLU
- A strong immune system and clean internal/external environments are keys to prevention and reversal of these and other diseases
- Proper nutrition is a must! Patients should regularly consume fresh fruits, vegetables, low sugar foods, exercise regularly, reduce daily stress and get sufficient rest. They should also avoid immune system destroyers such as foods high in saturated fats; white sugar and white flour products