



Behind One Ton of Medicine

By Hui-Lan Wang and Chiu-Hui Huang
Photographed by Yu-Chih Wu
Translated by George Lin

Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital prepared drugs and medical supplies for around 1,000 patients usage for the 1st medical team. The hospital continuously prepares medical supplies for each team. The picture shows the 1st lot of drugs and supplies in Taoyuan International Airport April 27, 2015.



On April 25, 2015, by noon, a strong earthquake hit Nepal at around 2pm Taiwan time. Right after the earthquake, Tzu Chi immediately got started with its work on disaster relief. Next day after the quake, there were massive casualties reported from media via TV or Web from time to time. Rescue teams from many countries kept arriving and providing assistance. Comparing with Nepal, people in Taipei were safe and blessed. Since Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital is close to Taoyuan Airport, it is in charge of preparing medical supplies right away.

As one of the members on the first relief team, Dr. You-Chen Chao, Superintendent of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, called on a meeting with the heads of the hospital in order to get the medical supplies prepared before the relief team set off on 27th.

Director of Pharmacy Department Da-Yu Wu was in charge of the preparation of drugs and medical supplies. Director of General Office, Jing-Hui Wu called on other staff to help preparing the medical supplies. Over one ton of drugs and medical supplies were well packed by midnight of 27.

Asked about going to hospital to prepare drugs during on holidays, Director Wu replied, "Working in the hospital, we have to take turns taking

night shifts or working on holidays. As for drug preparation, it is also part of our daily work, which is nothing special. Just like you brush your teeth and wash your face after getting up every day. It is a task as usual."

Upon receiving the assignment, eight staff members from Pharmacy, one from General Office's warehouse, and one from storage rushed back to the hospital on Sunday afternoon without second thought and worked all the way till midnight. They finished their dinner quickly.

What kind of medicine should be prepared? After taking the adversary from doctors of ER Department, drugs for trauma patients are recommended. In the beginning, we prepared drugs for 1000 patients to meet their short-term needs. In the meantime, considering the disaster might have caused shortages of regular drugs, they prepared drugs for chronic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure, and for acute diseases such as gastrointestinal, respiratory symptoms, infections, pains, allergies, and skin.

At 11 p.m., everything was ready: fifty-four kinds of drugs in sixty-four boxes. Twenty-four kinds of medical supplies, and eight kinds of surgical instruments such as hemostats, tweezers, curved bowls, etc. The total



weight was about twelve hundred kilograms. In order to take care of the members of disaster relief team, 29 kinds of drugs for diseases such as malaria, altitude sickness and others were also prepared, based on CDC's recommendation for tourism Nepal.

To make the drugs go through the customs along with the medical team smoothly, vice superintendent Rong-Yuan Shyu and director of secretary Li-Hua Chiao took documents to Food and Drug Administration Office of Health and Welfare Ministry to apply for permits. After getting the permit,

they rushed to the airport to meet with Superintendent Chao.

At the same time, the heads of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital gathered at the lobby to help audit the drugs and supplies and upload them to the trucks. Then, the volunteers delivered them to Taoyuan Airport. It was a special scene to see medical team members in the blue and white uniform and boxes of medicine at the airport lobby.

Director Da-Yu Wu has been working in this hospital since opening. In the past decade, he has prepared medical supplies for the free clinics



Director Da-Yu Wu (left) mobilized the staff of Pharmacy Dept. of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital to prepare drugs for free clinics in Nepal.

To give a hand to the Nepal quake victims, even the supt. Chao and senior visiting doctors of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital join the load the medical supplies.



of several international disaster relief projects. The latest one was for the free clinic in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2006. “Our hospital has always prepared medical supplies for free clinics of emergency. I was thinking there is no need to prepare so many medical supplies because it had been very peaceful for many years. I couldn’t image the disaster in Nepal was so severe,”he said.

Within six hours, eight pharmacists and two staffs had prepared drugs and supplies for 1000 patients. To most people, it sounded impossible but they accomplished the mission and said it was nothing special. Normally, the three drug warehouses in the hospital have stored over a thousand kinds of

items, and they are handling with over 10 carts of drip infusion every day. The preparation this time was less than 100 items. Usually, they didn’t count the weight of drugs. As they had to weigh the drugs this time, they realized the drugs weighted over one ton.

The pharmacists felt it was nothing to mention it and there were no special skills at all because they were just doing what they should do.

By the end of May, seven relief teams have gone to Nepal for help. The hospital has prepared about fifteen hundred kilograms of drugs and medical supplies for free clinics. The relief teams will continue to hold free clinics in Nepal.