



When Medicine Walks with Charity

By: Ning-Sheng Lai, Superintendent of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital

Although the past few months had been intense, it was exceptionally fulfilling.

As soon as the news on the 731 Kaohsiung gas explosion broke out, we began discussing on what we could do. Everyone was concerned with the accident, since it happened in the proximity of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, and many hospital employees come from Kaohsiung. On Aug. 1, the entire hospital staff and volunteers assembled in the hospital lobby to pray for the gas explosion survivors.

We arrived at the Zuoying Station of Taiwan High Speed Rail at 8:30 am, Aug. 2, to meet up with the staff led by Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital Supt. Chien and Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital Supt. Chao, as well as the medical volunteers of Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA), to discuss our aid options. First, we assisted the medical station in Wucyuan Elementary School, then conducted home visits on the outskirts of the disaster zone. We encountered many locals with minor injuries along the way. After a brief chat, we realized that they remained traumatized by the event and required mental support.

On the following day, we celebrated Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital's 14th Anniversary with community outreach. Vice Supt. Lai, Vice Supt. Chen and I led a team each to clean the homes of our three care recipients. I was in charge of Hsieh's house at Waixizhou, Shuishang Township. Another team headed towards the Sacred Heart Home. Activities such as this have become the tradition of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital. Many of our staff enjoyed bringing their children along.

Dr. Hsu from rheumatology was a first-timer. "I was shocked how messy it was when I entered the house," said she. "But I soon realized that, a little contribution of everyone, can change the life of a family." Indeed, after we cleaned the house, the owner of the house was overwhelmed with gratitude. Although everyone may have aching muscles once they return home, I believe they will also be overwhelmed with a sense of accomplishment.

On Nov. 9, we collaborated with the TIMA Yunchianan chapter and expanded the scope of our medical outreach. We mobilized over 200 medical staff and volunteers, divided into 24 teams, and reached 67 families of care recipients and 21 families of Tzu Chi volunteers.

Mr. Wei, one of the care recipients I visited, was a laryngeal cancer patient who singlehandedly nursed his bedridden wife for years. Overwhelmed with poverty and disease, he demonstrated an incredible will to survive. Mr. Chang, another care recipient, became inarticulate after a buccal cancer surgery. Coupled with low self-esteem, he eventually locked himself inside his house, away from the outside world. We went to Chang's house, not only to monitor his health condition and rehabilitation progress, but to break the invisible chain that bound him by encouraging him to join our recycling volunteers.

Mr. Li was recently added to the list of our long-term care recipients. His mother, 84, lost her sight and remained bedridden for years; his eldest son had kidney disease, and later psoriasis, that caused constant pain from cracked and shedding skin; his second son was in poor physical health and

Photo depicts Orthopedist Chang-Jen Yang joined Tzu Chi volunteers paying a home visit to check an old man's health.



suffered from depression. The responsibility to take care of his mother fell on the shoulder of the 86 years old father.

Both of Li's sons married foreign spouses, and they left home after giving birth to a child. Li's eldest son, a cleaner, had to carry the family financially and rear the children. The heavy responsibility prohibited him from seeking medical attention. During the outreach, I explained to Li and his family that psoriasis can be treated with current medicine, and that they should light up their lives by walking out of the house and join our recycling volunteers.

Orthopedist Chang-Jen Yang, who participated in many outreaches, faced a shocking revelation during this particular one. As he walked into the care recipient's residence, he saw Mr. Hsieh, who sat in a dark corner of house, complained about weakness in the limbs. Hsieh, for reasons unknown, lost the ability to walk many years before. A year ago, he began to lost control over his arms. He required assistance with his every need ever since, and the lost of independence had a detrimental impact on his personality. The professional sensitivity of an orthopedist drew Yang's attention to Hsieh's medical history and the treatments he had received.

“Which lame orthopedist fail to properly treat his patient,” Yang wondered with frustration. When Hsieh finally managed to find one of his prescriptions, on top of it wrote his name - Chang-Jen Yang.

Back in 2009, Yang recalled, Hsieh came to him at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital to treat the weakness in his lower limbs. When the preliminary testing failed to pinpoint the cause, Yang explained to Hsieh the diagnosis. “I wrote him a chronic continuous prescription, and then he vanished from my patient list ever since,” Yang said. The shocking revelation was a heavy blow to Yang professionally and personally.

“It is time for reflection,” Yang contemplated. If doctors can spare each of their patients a little more time, to be empathetic about their patients and families, to attempt to comprehend their difficulties and the reasons behind their refusal for treatment, things could change for the better. Even if there are no sound answers to their medical problems, an active and empathetic care from the doctors could elevate their patients’ faith in medicine, or, in life. Yang’s lesson is also a lesson for us all, a reminder to be mindful at every moment. Sometimes, doing a little more than we should could alter our patients’ fate.

We invited many resident physicians to join us in this medical outreach. By having experienced doctors leading inexperienced ones, the young doctors have a chance to witness the unique medical culture of Tzu Chi firsthand.

Our entire medical staff celebrated the anniversary of our hospital and the Doctors’ Day by reaching out to our community. It helps us to understand the true nature of suffering and blessing by servicing the people in need, and to build a solid and profound medical culture. We are no saint. When work piles up, many of us tend to forget our initial inspiration. May this annual opportunity of medical outreach serves as a reminder to all our staff of our initial inspiration.