



Best Medical Staff Do Health-Promoting

by Dr. Chin-Lon Lin, CEO of Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation

The emergence of the health care industry was due to the sickness of human beings. The physician profession is the result of sickness that causes pain, suffering or even death. This industry aims to cure diseases, relieve pain and prolong life. In the West, physicians and nurses, or the establishments of clinics and hospitals in the last hundreds of years are all focused on curing diseases and extending human life. In the 21st century, the quality of medicine, medication and technologies evolved, yet the excess of curing disease and prolonging lives have caused a huge waste in medical resources. Using Taiwan as an example, a large part of expenses is spent on intensive care services. We use ECMO (Extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) equipment, tubes, and respiratory aids to lengthen patients' lives. However, the effectiveness is less than 50% according to recent studies. It means that half of all medical expenses are inefficient. This situation demands that we review the whole process of administering medicine; to look at it from another angle, and to explore the nature of medicine again. Medicine should not involve simply taking action only when a person is sick. It should have as an objective the "prevention of illness." A positive way to prevent illness is to "promote health."

Actually, this was pointed out long ago by Chinese ancestors recorded in Huangdi Neijing (The medical Classic of the Yellow Emperor, an old medicine Scripture), which states, “The superior medicine prevents illness; the mediocre medicine takes care of syndromes, and the inferior medicine treats diseases.”

Therefore, at present we can say “the superior medicine involves the promotion of health.” Put it in another way, the new definition of medicine is to make a person healthy and productive in terms of the need of the family, the society, the body and mind; and to make the best use of one’s potential. This is also Tzu Chi Medical Foundation’s mission – becoming “The Guardians of Lives.”

More than twenty years ago, the WHO (World Health Organization) started a program to promote healthy patient hospitals. However, it was mainly implemented in Europe. When I learned about this, I suddenly realized that this is what we have been doing. Whether it is for energy saving, environment friendliness, water and power conservation, waste and carbon reduction, vegetarian practice, patients’ health education and community based health-care, Tzu Chi hospital is carrying out health promotion. Beginning at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, then expanding to Hualien, Taipei, Yuli, Taichung and Kuanshan, and becoming a member of WHO’s HPH network.

April 2008, it was me who, for first time, led Tzu Chi’s staff to participate in the 16th International Conference on HPH (Health Promoting Hospitals) held in Berlin, Germany. Two reports handed in by our staff have been accepted by the Conference. One was addressed in oral sessions; the other in mini-oral sessions. The reports were shocking to the organization and conference attendees. People gave us high marks and they look at us differently ever since.

The reason was that health promotion in Europe was based on theory more-so than practice. At that time, participating countries mostly focused on reducing weight and quitting smoking. But with the case of Tzu Chi hospital, HPH is actively encouraged throughout the entire hospital. Led by the superintendent, health promotion is systematically implemented involving four components: patients, employees, community and the environment. This has shown European medical workers our completed and practical achievement. Afterwards, the spiritual part of health promotion was added.

After five years, reports addressed in conferences sponsored by the Tzu Chi Medical Foundation increased exponentially. In 2010 we delivered 26 reports, at the 20th Conference in April 2012, 65 reports were issued. They are the outcomes of health promotion done by staff from our six hospitals and departments which specialize in different areas. Whether it's being a mother-baby friendly, elderly friendly and environmental friendly hospital, or campaigns to quit smoking, quit chewing betel nuts, reduce weight and become vegetarians, these efforts all aim to help all elderly, middle-aged, adult, and adolescent people in different ethnic communities to promote health.

During these few years, the Bureau of Health Promotion (BHP), Department of Health has been proactively leading Taiwan's Hospitals to join the HPH network. We also appreciate the efforts of Shu-Ti Chiou, director-general of BHP and her staff for securing Taiwan's selection as host for the HPH's 20th International Conference. Because of this conference, medical experts from more than 40 countries were able to discover Taiwan and learn about Tzu Chi.

We also received some positive results from the 20th Conference in our efforts to promote a vegetarian diet and reduce carbon emission. Almost all of the conference participants ate vegetarian meals. Many European countries have started to encourage the consumption of a meat-free, plant-based diet among its citizens, and also agreed that it is the best way to create a friendly environment and reduce carbon emission. Dr. Jürgen M. Pelikan, Chair of the Scientific Committee, Vienna, for example, is a vegetarian. We also learned that many who were not fond of vegetarian food were willing to take their first step and try to eat one vegetarian meal a week. This is the first step in their efforts to promote health and demonstrate their love for the earth.

In September 2011, the London-based NGO, World Preservation Foundation, released in a paper entitled "Plant-Based Diets: A Solution To Our Public Health Crisis" stated, "The people of the UK should switch to a meat-free diet, including milk and eggs-free products. It would reduce work-age related illnesses and could save the UK up to £100 billion a year; around the size of the entire annual NHS (National Health Services) budget...also reduce diabetes, cardiovascular disease and severe

obesity problem.” NGO called upon UK’s Prime Minister to encourage the implementation of a plant-based diet as a solution to the severe obesity problem in the UK. The UK is currently the most obese nation in Europe. Former US President, Bill Clinton after his cardiovascular stent surgery followed the dietary research (based on the China Study) done by Cornell University professors, including Dr. T Colin Campbell, which recommended the adoption a plant-based diet and reduction of cholesterol consumption. This helped President Clinton reduce his weight and maintain his health. There are many global studies that have proven that vegetarian diets are the best way to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, chronic disease and cancers.

Finally, many of the natural disasters are due to the extreme climate that continuously occurs in the world. Additionally, to reduce world hunger, Master Cheng Yen promotes the campaign of “Eating 80% and spare the remaining 20% for the needy.” Only by the simple way of controlling one’s appetite, we can be healthy and our environment can be protected – an easy way to make us worry less and be more content.



Tzu Chi Medical Foundation promotes vegetarian diet in various ways. Photo depicts Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital senior volunteer Hui-Mei Yen adds secret meal to hospital lunch cafeteria which successfully attracts staff.