

The First and the Hundredth Smile

Narrated by Ing-Ho Chen, Director of Dept. of Orthopedics & Honorary Superintendent of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital



I still remember, in the central corridor of National Taiwan University Hospital, my first encounter with Master Cheng Yen. The sight of her vigorously recruiting doctors, frowning because of the scarce medical resources in Hualien, remains vivid to this day.

I am a son of Tainan County, born into a family of civil servants, third among the four brothers. Since majority of my family elders works in the field of medicine, be a doctor became a quite obvious goal in my life. I studied my way through top ranked Taipei Municipal Jianguo High School and later the National Taipei University College of Medicine. Saving lives is the duty

of every doctor. The surgical system with instant therapeutic results is something that I longed for, and since orthopedics is, in my opinion, is a department that is most “surgical”, it became my vocational choice.

My mentor played a vital role in my decision to leave National Taiwan University Hospital for rural Hualien. The encouragement from my mentor at NTUH - Orthopedic Director Tang-Lui Liu and Surgical Director Kai-Mo Chen, and the potentiality of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital to

hone my skills, facilitated my decision to change hospital. Although I had no prior knowledge as to what Tzu Chi is about, a brief meeting with Master Cheng Yen made me feel with clarity her endeavor and grand expectation in search of available medical staff for Eastern Taiwan, and it moved me.

Medical science places great emphasis on the incidence of any disease. Ankylosing spondylitis, for example, has an incidence of 2/1000, a rate that can be categorized in the epidemiological discipline. The speculation is accurate: out of every thousand people, two will suffer ankylosing spondylitis. Two in one thousand, to most people, is simply a number in epidemiology; to me, it is a number that the society, the public, and everyone must endure collectively. If two out of a thousand must suffer the disease, they are the bodhisattva who endure the pain and suffering for the other nine-hundreds-and-ninety-eight. Simply by treating these two patients, the medical science as we know advances with it.

Every time I see a patient, it is as if I am seeing myself in pain and suffering. If fate alternates, I may very well be that patient and he the doctor. I, therefore, see every patient with empathy by adopting a patient oriented view. Whether the patient



Inspired by Master Cheng Yen's compassion, the young Ing-Ho Chen chose Hualien as his destination, a place to which he remains to this day. (Upper Photo) Master Cheng Yen visited Chuan-Chin Lin in 1988, who's limbs were amputated due to an accident.

(Lower Photo) Chuan-Chin Lin, injured by fallen rocks had finally overcome his sever lack-of-skin condition after several months in bed. For him to leave the hospital is a major breakthrough in treatments. Ing-Ho Chen brought him to the abode to receive Master Cheng Yen's blessing. Dr. Chen is the right most person.

is the first or the hundredth in line, it is the only chance to see a doctor on that particular day. Since it is the only chance, they should not receive different treatment; if the first patient sees an energetic doctor with a vibrant smile, the hundredth patient should not see a fatigued, lifeless doctor. People often ask me why do I work so late, how I can maintain my smile with ease after seeing over hundred patients, to which I answer, "I have upheld my principle over the years. It comes naturally now without much effort."

All I did for my patients is to attend to their diseases, the life philosophy I



The medical skills of Honorary Superintendent Ing-Ho Chen has be included in the world orthopedic curriculum, a must-read for all orthopedic surgeons around the globe. The photo depicts orthopedic surgeons from Indonesia coming to watch Ing-Ho Chen (2nd to the right) performing surgery.

have learnt from them far surpassed what I have given them. Over two decades of practicing medicine, there are two patients that stayed in my mind. The phrase "treat diseases as mentors" has a different meaning to me.

One of them is Chen Ching, my first patient at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital. Suffering from a rare disease, pelvic desmoid tumor, at the age of 14, Chen sort medical treatment up north and removed partial tumor. Yet a year after, the tumor spread, and Chen came to the newly founded Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital to seek medical treatment. We, an interdisciplinary medical team, performed a total of seven major surgeries on her.

I had witnessed, during the prolonged treatment, Chen's courage to face the disease and to break the shackle of her predicament. She completed her study at Hualien Girls High, National Tsing Hua University and all the way up to graduate school. Now, aside from employed at Hsinchu Science Park, Chen has settled down in marriage. I often received her postcards from Europe while she was on official assignments. Every time I see her fine, elegant handwriting, it would remind me of her struggle and her triumph, and that would leave me feeling ashamed. Chen's resilience truly inspired me in many ways.



Battling pelvic desmoid tumor since 14 years old, Chen Ching would send a postcard to Ing-Ho Chen no matter where she visit around the world, to inform him of her well being.

Shu-Hui Chen is the other patient. More than a decade ago when we first met, she could not move at all. Ankylosing spondylitis had caused Chen's hip joints to trap inside her pelvis, threatening the large blood vessels inside. After I performed an emergency hip removal surgery, Chen had to stay in a wheelchair, but at least her life is saved. What inspired me as her husband's determination. For over a decade he stayed with her despite her illness, attending to her ever needs. They lived in Changhua, but to ensure that Chen has the best treatment possible, they flew frequently between Changhua and Hualien. Their home had been refurnished to become an barrier-free environment. Chen's husband often told me that he was afraid of aging, for he won't be able to take care of his wife forever. In Sept. this year, her husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer and soon passed



Patient's health is the best present for Ing-Ho Chen. He treasures every postcard Chen Ching sent to him.

away. I have seen from them the most
Two decades of medical practice passed in a blink of an eye. I have seen and learnt invaluable lessons from my patients. If I am to have any epiphany in my medical career, I would attribute them all to every single one of my patients.