

Medical Outreach after Typhoon Haiyan


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In November of 2013, the powerful Typhoon Haiyan also known as Yolanda swept across the Philippines with wind speeds exceeding 300 km/hr. It was the strongest typhoon in thirty years and it devastated the Philippines. The

official death count was over 6,000 with an additional 30,000 people injured. Tacloban and Leyte were hit the hardest by the disaster. Destruction spread out as far as the eyes can see.

Within a week of the disaster, Tzu Chi volunteers sent supplies to the disaster zone. At the same time, Tzu Chi began



The local Filipino airport was seriously damaged. The Tzu Chi volunteers awaiting transfer upon arrival with the supplies.



Passing through the aftermath of the disaster, the free clinic team hopes to provide a lot of assistance to the victims.

“cash-for-work program”, providing aid to the victims by paying wages to the disaster victims to rebuild their homeland. TIMA and Tzu Chi hospitals first mobilized and left for Tacloban to setup free clinics and provide assistance. The team later went to Ormoc, an inland disaster area.

Entering the Disaster Zone by Land, Sea and Air

On Nov. 22 at 5:30am, Chin-Lon Lin, CEO of Tzu Chi Medical Foundation, simultaneously organized the first and the second disaster relief teams from Taiwan. Altogether, fifty-five people assembled at the Taoyuan International Airport for Manila bound flight. Chong-Chi Lin,

a dentist from Taiwan TIMA’s central chapter temporarily suspended his office to participate. The Superintendent of Chu Shang Show Chwan Hospital, Hui-Lung Hsieh, rearranged his busy schedule to participate in the relief.

Land transportation after the disaster had not been restored. In order to reach the disaster zone as quickly as possible, the medical team upon arrival in Manila immediately boarded a bus bound for the domestic airport to fly to Cebu. After arriving in Cebu, they rode a ferry to Ormoc. Owing to delays along the way, the group had already traveled seventeen hours by the time they set foot on Ormoc. The typhoon’s damage was apparent upon entering a restaurant. The

roof was blown off and rain seep through. Fortunately, electricity and cold water was available.

The next day was followed non-stop chain of events. At 4:30 in the morning upon darkness the group headed out towards Tacloban. The nearly three hour's

journey seemed like a disaster movie. Peering through a window with a fine layer of drizzle, as far as the eye can see, not a single structure was left untouched. Homes, gas stations, power lines and trees lie in the wake of the destruction as if someone dropped an atomic bomb.



In order to be able to communicate with patients, doctors listened attentively for instructions prior to their visits. They grasp the opportunity to study simply words from the local volunteers.



Sou-Hsin Chien, Superintendent of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital calms the patient's qualm while working a wound.



Vice Supt. of Tzu Chi Hospital Heng-Chia Chang(right) carefully listens to the victims during examination.



Due to the lack of medical chairs, the dentists were only able to find a place for patients to rest their heads for dental treatments. photo depicts Dr. Chin-Lung Hsieh.

“We saw many disaster victims with lonely expressions watching us pass through wondering why we did not stop. Moreover, we saw people holding signs saying “we need food.” It really made people feel sad!” Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital Geriatric Director, Kun-Wei Tsai, was greatly sympathetic and disheartened. The Superintendent of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, You-Chen Chao, M.D., also saw a ten year old child on the side of the road holding a cardboard sign “help us.” He thought to himself, what more can I do for them?

Physicians Learn Dialect from Treating Victims

The time of the day changed from darkness to dawn when the bus arrived at the “Magnificent Gift of Knowledge (LiZhiXingHua) Middle School” at Tacloban; there were already close to one thousand locals gathered in the square waving their hands and shouting “Tzu Chi! Tzu Chi!” Inside the gymnasium, the people gathered and waiting to see doctors. The gym consisted of a temporary make-shift shelter for those with no homes to return to. In addition to adapting to the surroundings, the medical team needed to overcome the language barrier. It was the first time to volunteer in a foreign free clinic for Daoqian Tang from the Internal Medicine Department



Wen-Hsin Tsai, a Pediatrician from Taipei Tzu Chi hospital (first from right) reminds people of the medication precautions.



Nonie (first on the right), served as a translator to Kuo-Chih Tseng, Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital Internal Medicine Director (middle) in seeing patients.

of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital. Dr. Tang said, “Except for the local volunteers who assisted in translation, many of the residents were unable to speak English at the clinic. The translators used a blackboard to write common terms such as cough, where it hurts, and fever. This provided the doctors and nurses a convenient way to communicate.” The specialists suddenly became young students learning to read and pronounce in order to build an intimate relationship with the victims.

“Don’t worry, everything will be fine.” The victims were physically exhausted and afraid to face their wounds. The gentle words of Sou-Hsin Chien, Superintendent of Taichung Tzu Chi

Hospital, and Anesthesiologist Chang-Hung Lin, calmed the patients as they administered the anesthesia. A few minutes later, the procedure was finished. After the feeling of pain diminished, patients smiled happily and repeatedly expressed gratitude to the doctors. Despite being in a hot and humid environment, the doctors were attentive and tirelessly seeing patients inside the clinic. Zhu Jincai, a volunteer who came from Zimbabwe, was especially moved, “The doctors let go of their self-esteem, open their arms to embrace victims and alleviate their pain. It is amazing.” Zhu knew from experience that when doctors can calm the fears of people, it is better than medication.



Local residents appreciated the mutual respect from Tzu Chi distribution. They were patiently praying in the rain.

Dr. Wen-Hsin Tsai, a Pediatrician from Taipei Tzu Chi hospital said, "Perhaps it will continue to rain in the next few days. There is no water and electricity. Nine out of ten children who came here were treated for colds or gastroenteritis. Fortunately, these ailments are not serious. Common medicine will control the problem."

One of Filipino TIMA surgeons Dr. Robert Sy, M.D., was in the surgical clinic. Yesterday, he was in the Ormoc free clinic. Today he followed the group to Tacloban. "All the victims waited for at least ten days to come to the clinic. When people are suffering, the little we give means a lot of help to them," said Robert.



Filipino TIMA's surgeon Robert Sy (right) practically a resident, resolves every kind of problem for the residents.



Tzu Chi volunteers explained the meaning of the "Bamboo Banks Era". Even coins can be a collective force to help the needy.



Staffing in the disaster area was inadequate, Doctors and nurses had to wear many hats to assist one another.

Return with Full Emotion

In the afternoon, the free clinic teams were divided into three groups to visit victims along the route of cash-for-work program. The children playfully shouted, “Tzu Chi! Tzu Chi!” Even the locals involved in the clean-up effort enthusiastically encouraged the team by chanting “Tzu Chi - go, go, go!” On the morning of November 26, the group prepared for its return to Taiwan. The customs officials at the border were aware of the free clinic in the disaster area. As the Tzu Chi team was passing through, many of them thoughtfully said, “Thank you for coming to the Philippines to help!” While the group waited in the boarding area, the airport attendants announced on the air, “These



Doctors from Taiwan and US handled wounds together.

medics went to the Tacloban disaster to provide relief. Please give them a round of applause.” Finally, the ground crews requested the medical clinic team to board last in order to take pictures with the team members to leave behind the unforgettable memories.

“Arriving in Taiwan is really like going to heaven!” Jeng-Yuan Wu, the director of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital Surgical Department, deeply felt that those born in Taiwan are fortunate. “If we go one day without water and electricity, it is already unbearable. The disaster victims surpassed two weeks.” This was the first time Dr. Lia-Kai Chang, the director of the preventive medicine department, participated in an international free clinic. It turned out to be an unusual and deeply profound life experience. In contrast, Orthopedic surgeon Sai-

Tung Kwong of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital reminded colleagues who are preparing to go support the relief that mosquitos multiplied quickly after the flood receded. On top of that you must sleep on small mats under mosquito nets. So, one must bring mosquito ointment and personal preferred clinical equipment. In particular, all the power and lighting equipment must be prepared first. Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital Vice President, Wen-Lin Hsu, said the local pediatric care and ophthalmic care as well as the ophthalmic medicines are the most lacking. He hopes his suggestion to serve as a reference for the medical team and is able to give the most appropriate help.

Eyeglasses and Acupuncture Are the Most Popular

Jui-Teng Chien, Vice Supt. of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, led the second free clinic departing on November 29. Ming-Jye Huang, Director of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital Dentistry Dept., already arranged outpatient services up to the Chinese New Year. This time he could participate in the free clinic this time. Beforehand, he specially asked for patient's opinions. The patients supported and rearranged the outpatient services schedule, so he can go forward to the free clinic in the disaster area.



The Manila Airport ground crew broadcast a "thank you", they even wanted a photo with Tzu Chi medical team.

Continue the first relief group's power of love, the second group included members of TIMA from five countries, a total of 87 members continued to carry out the free clinics in Tacloban. The site was chosen to be the local San Jose Church. Kun-Chi Wu, Hualian Tzu Chi Hospital's Orthopedics Dept., said that because local victims had few injuries, and there was an insufficient amount of pharmacists, he served as a temporary head of nursing and pharmacy, the latter position required the dispensing of supplies. Except for the procedure of tooth extraction, Director Ming-Jye Huang also spent his free time helping in the pharmacy. He expressed that during the clinic, doctors must make use of their time. He also noted that the handwritten prescriptions were often illegible so pharmacists had to confirm the doctor's orders. Director Huang joked, "Finally, I learned the hardship of nurses and pharmacists. Next time, I will indeed write clearly and not create a burden for the groups."

"Na Ka-ka ba sa ka ba - Can you see clearly?" Asked Nancy Chen, M.D., Hualian Hospital's ophthalmology department. All of the disaster victims that arrived there told her that they were unable to see clearly. All of their glasses were swept away by the flood. Fortunately, Filipino TIMA prepared 550 pairs of glasses. More than 300 pairs

were given to the victims allowing them to return to their normal lives.

Kaohsiung TIMA's Dr. Sen Wu provided acupuncture services on-site. Many of the locals were curious and tried acupuncture. Dr. Wu brought 8,000 acupuncture needles to the Philippines so he could immediately treat the patient's pain. Bulinda felt all of the weight of her body being released after receiving a treatment. All of her body was relaxed. She expressed gratitude for Tzu Chi's coming to rescue. It was the first time travelling to a disaster zone's clinic for Kuo-Liang Chiu, M.D., of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital (Thoracic cavity internal medicine). He cordially greeted Little Rose who was born on the first day of Haiyan's attack. Her mother said, "We will always remember her birthday, it was a tragic day for Tacloban."

When Yuli Tzu Chi Hospital Emergency Room Director, Chih-Yan Lin, learned that the free clinic needed surgeons, he immediately signed up because his specialty is orthopedics. Dr. Lin said, "This time the free clinic activities made one feels as though the amount of help is insufficient. Contrary to one's expectations, a lot of our time was spent either on a train or airplane. He left the previous night from Yuli toward Taipei. At 4 am, he took a taxi from Taoyuan to the airport. The driver joked with him, "I have never picked any one up so early to go



After returning to Yuli from the Philippines, Chih-Yen Lin (fourth from the right), Director of the Yuli Tzu Chi Hospital Emergency Room, was welcomed by his wife, daughter and colleagues in the lobby.

the airport. The counters in the airport are closed right now!”

At 11 pm on December 3, Dr. Lin arrived in Yuli Township. His wife and over ten colleagues pleasantly surprised him by hosting a reception in the hospital. Dr. Lin took photos during this journey to share the emotions of the events with everyone. He said, “Even though the typhoon already happened a long time ago, the disaster area still has many things waiting to be done. Before Tzu Chi’s disaster relief arrived, every one merely took the trash out of the homes. Afterwards, they went to a place with free food. Tzu Chi subsidized the effort to help the victims to be able to use all of their heart and soul to rebuild their homes. This program was universally accepted by the local people. They opined that the fruits of their own labor were the most rewarding. It is

dignified out of respect, and much better than giving them money.”

The Free Clinic Mobilization, a Real Sensation in a Downtown Alley

Kaosiung’s TIMA, surgeon Tian-Hao Yeh participated in the second-round free clinic in the Philippines. After the other volunteers returned to Taiwan, he and his wife, pharmacist Hong-Yen Chen, remained in the Philippines. They were in the Sakahan district to promote “the free clinic mobilization.” A promotional banner was hanging in the region’s activity center to let everyone know that doctors were coming today. Volunteer Mingshuang Lee went to a bustling street to invite people in need of help to come to the clinic. Within a few moments, there was a long line of registered people. A leader of the

local area also came to help greet the patients.

The first person to register was a mother whose child had had a cold for a few days. Another patient was seven year old, La Lan. She burned the soles of her foot stepping on a mosquito coil. Due to a lack of adequate medicine, the foot became infected with a large blister. The blister was lanced and disinfected. After a short burst of crying, the procedure was finally complete. An eighty-three year old grandmother with diabetes had a large, deep wound on the top of her foot making it difficult for her to visit doctors. Dr. Tian-Hao Yeh carefully washed the wound and applied dressing. The old grandmother saw her foot and shyly smiled. Shortly after, a wave of people assembled causing two concerned local police officers' attention. After some investigation, the police officers were touched by seeing doctors

helping others. They even expressed the need to learn the essence of “helping your neighbor” from Tzu Chi. They hoped that in the future they could also become volunteers.

Illuminate Hope, See the Energy of the Future

The TIMA volunteers of the final free clinic group came from six countries. Altogether, there were 104 participants in the group – the sixth round of relief in the Philippines. On December 11, they departed to provide surgery, ophthalmology, and pediatric care. Two days later, a free clinic was held at TongJia Elementary School between Tacloban and Ormoc. Even by 9 am, a long line of patients waited under the hot sun to receive medicine. Jin-Cherng Chen, Vice Supt. of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, rushed over to assist



TIMA doctors, no matter from Taiwan or local Filipino, seeing victims with concern.



Supt. of Hualian Tzu Chi Hospital, Ruey-Ho Kao(right), and Tzu Chi University's President, Dr. Pen-Jung Wang (left), attended the Tacloban free clinic. Because it was hot and humid in the Catholic Church, the treatment room was set up outside.

the Pharmacy. Afterwards, he led a large group of people to dilapidated auditorium to protect them from the sun. Suddenly, a large disturbance erupted on the playground. Domingo, a thirty-six year old well worker, entered a well to rescue his older brother who suffered methane poisoning. He tried carrying his older brother up a ladder, but collapsed midway and fell back into the well. The two brothers were stuck underneath. A local fireman attempted but was too big for his size. Chen Shihzhong, a volunteer from Thailand, had received search and rescue training. With five others support and assistance, Chen entered the well and rescued them. Domingo suffered multiple contusions and unable to speak. After treatment for wounds, Domingo's vital signs were stabilized and he was sent to a hospital for treatment.

On November 12, the Filipino TIMA started the Cebu and Ormoc free clinics. Over a period of one month, doctors and nurses from many different rotations worked relentlessly to provide health care to the suffering, a total of 6,326 patients benefited from the service. Jui-Teng Chien, Vice President of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, learned the true meaning of the cash-for-work program. As many local volunteers said, "this is not the same as getting wages for the labor. It is the care and love coming from Taiwan, and the blessings of Master Cheng Yen." In order to ease the sadness, volunteers not only provided much needed supplies, but rather the kind of loving care that helped them gather strength to see the future, and to see hope that their homeland is here to stay for the better.