

Doctor Continues Work After Stroke, Dreams of Hospital

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A doctor in one of the remotest areas of Taiwan continues to serve his community despite a stroke at the age of 39 which paralyzed half of his body. His dream is build a hospital in the area so that the residents do not have to drive 100 kilometers to reach one.

Dr Xu Chao-bin recounted his remarkable story to more than 300 medical staff and students in a lecture hall in the Hualian Tzu Chi Hospital on March 29, in a lecture entitled “Medicine and Life.” His presentation was full of humor that brought tears and laughter to the audience, as well as admiration for his good looks; his reputation as ‘Super Doctor’ preceded him and many came to hear his story.

Xu was born in Da-ren village, in the far south of Taitung county in southeast Taiwan. It has a population of 4,141 people scattered over a wide area, many in remote settlements on the side of mountains. Many are Aborigines, descendants of the earliest inhabitants of Taiwan. Xu graduated from Taipei Medical University and served three years in the Tainan Chimei Hospital, where he qualified as a doctor of internal and emergency medicine. While most people in his position would have chosen to work in a big city hospital which offers high salaries and good promotion prospects, he decided to go back to his home village because he saw the urgent need for medical care. In Taipei, there is one doctor for every 62 people; in Da-ren village, he is the only doctor for 4,141 people.



It was a grueling assignment, involving long hours to see patients and travel on mountain roads to reach them. “My hope was that the villagers would no longer be afraid to fall sick at any time. As long as I am here, they do not need to worry that an illness in the middle of the night or an accident could cost them their life because of the long drive to a hospital,” he said. He built the district’s first Health Center with an evening and holiday clinic, a 24-hour emergency care center and a mobile medical service. He transformed the quality of care. This level of commitment took a heavy toll: he was working over 400 hours a month.

Finally, the health of the ‘super doctor’ collapsed: he had a stroke at the age of just 39, the prime of life. As he was being rushed to hospital in the ambulance, Xu was not concerned about himself but the health of the villagers: “if I fell, what would happen to them? Who can they look for when they get sick?” He lost the use of the left side of the body and had to rest for six and a half months. Despite this terrible blow which would have destroyed the will of most people, Dr Xu determined to carry on his life’s work. “When you lose the light, don’t be afraid. Because you can still see the light of the stars in the sky, I am content still to have my right arm and right leg.” His inspiring words moved the 300 people in the audience. The loss of these functions brought him closer to his patients as he could better realize the pain they suffer; he trained the nurses at the Health Center to become the limbs he has lost. With one hand, he can still stitch perfectly the wounds of the villagers; with one leg, he can still drive over the mountains to serve the

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patients in remote areas.

“The stroke was the price I paid for overwork. I have thought about it but believe that this is my personality: if I were to choose again, I would do the same thing.” Under the white gown of Dr. Xu Chao-bin, there is a devoted and compassionate heart that can feel the suffering of patients. This deeply moved the future doctors in the audience. With a broad smile, he said: “Duplicating my ‘handsomeness’ is impossible, but I wish to duplicate more ‘Xu Chao-bins’, so that together we can care for our beloved villagers in their remote districts.”

His Greatest Strength comes from the Trust of the Villagers



His humorous and touching presentation received good feedback. One student asked: “What is it that has supported you so far?”

With a smile, he answered: “A grandmother from an Aboriginal tribe, to whom I gave a prescription for one extra week, came to see me unhappy two weeks later -- she had to stay at home and could not come to the Health Center sooner to get diagnosed and talk with me. A middle-aged man would rather bear the pain from the gaping wound in his head for one week and wait for me to come back to the village from a business trip. These kinds of trust and close relationships are the reasons why, even after my stroke, I want to remain at my post and continue to treat the Aboriginal villagers.

It is they who not only have taught me how to be a good doctor but also has given me the strength to recover from the illness. How can I not help the villagers with my life? The emotions we share have gone beyond those of doctor and patient.”

“What I need to do now is to look after anyone I can and enjoy life. This was my original goal -- to make everyone with whom I come into contact live happily and die a natural death.” He has gone far beyond what is required of a doctor; he established the Taitung County Nanhui Health Promotion and Care Service Association for elderly people in his home town to receive care and attention and opened the “Fangzhou Classroom” for Aboriginal children to have a place to study after school and prepare for important roles in society. His long-term goal is to build a “Nanhui Hospital”. He does not want to see any more the long delays in treatment – sometimes fatal – when patients drive the 100 kilometers to the nearest hospital.

Although he lost the functions of his left body from the stroke, he has never stopped looking for the resources the area needs.

He sees service and dedication as a never-ending journey. Even though he now needs the help and support of other people, he still encourages students to actively participate in and learn from any activities in which they can experience life. Both the medical workers and students learnt a lot from the lecture. Dr. Xu Chao-bin’s humorous presentation not only showed them the poor medical environment of an area which has been short of medical resources for a long time; it also enabled them to see the kindness of this “Super Doctor” who treats the Aboriginal

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villagers with his whole heart. With no reserve, he has put their health and care as his top priority.

By Peng Wei-yun