

Tzu Chi Medical Teams to Sri Lanka

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Monday, 25 April 2005 00:00

The tsunami washed away all the pharmacies in Hambantota, Sri Lanka. There was only one local hospital in the area, and it was impossible for the staff to prescribe all the necessary medicine for the vast and sudden influx of patients. The Tzu Chi medical station opened six days after the disaster, and within three weeks had served over 12,000 people.

On the afternoon of December 28, the [Hualien Tzu Chi Medical Center](#) received instructions from the Tzu Chi Foundation to immediately begin preparing to send medicine and medical equipment to tsunami survivors in Sri Lanka.



What kind of medicine was needed for the survivors? With such short notice, the hospital decided on a one-month supply of medicines typically used in the emergency room and some medicine for dermatosis and chronic illnesses. A few hours later, over 150 boxes of medicine, weighing a total of 1,800 kilograms (3,968 pounds), were packed and ready to go.

The first Tzu Chi medical team left on December 29 and reached Hambantota on the evening of December 30. Including flights, transfers and connecting car rides, the team had traveled for close to 30 hours.

The medical station was opened the next morning! Four outpatient services and a pharmacy were well equipped so that the station could be run like a small clinic.

Lending help to survivors

Many people were already waiting in line before the clinic opened at 9 each morning. Injuries included minor abrasions, contusions, and lacerations that needed small operations. There were also more serious cases, as some of the tsunami's victims had been thrown around by the tidal waves and were injured from head to toe. As a consequence, their treatments were very complicated and time-consuming. Other survivors showed signs of severe psychological trauma because some or all of their family members had died: they couldn't sleep at night, they wept uncontrollably throughout the day, and most of the time they appeared absentminded and in a deep state of shock. In addition to careful treatment, the Tzu Chi doctors offered physical comfort to the survivors through simple gestures, such as holding the patients' hands, patting their shoulders or even by giving hugs.

People trusted and praised the Tzu Chi medical station and word spread quickly. Patients would come from as far as 30 kilometers (19 miles) away to be treated, and the number of patients rose from 254 people on the first day to 800 people per day two weeks later.

Wang Li-hsin, vice superintendent of the Hualien Tzu Chi Medical Center and also the leader of the first Tzu Chi medical team, pointed out that medical services in Sri Lanka are free, so people don't have to pay any fees to see doctors and obtain medicine. However, they do have to pay for examinations or for more expensive drugs. The tsunami swept away all of the pharmacies in Hambantota, and due to the sudden vast influx of patients, the local hospital

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could not provide all of the necessary medicine. Therefore, the Tzu Chi medical station became the only alternative hope for local patients.

Dr. Wang remarked that the team brought with them a significant amount of high-quality medicine. Supplies of antibiotics and medicine for patients with high blood pressure and diabetes were well stocked so as to fill the gap in the local medical services.

Dr. Wang specializes in infections. When someone with inflamed eyes came to the clinic, Dr. Wang would ascertain if the patient was a farmer or fisherman. If so, it was likely that the patient would have been in touch with dirty water and would probably have contracted leptospira. Once this diagnosis was confirmed, Dr. Wang would prescribe penicillin or tetracycline, which would effectively cure the condition.

The Tzu Chi medical station was small but well-equipped. It filled the gap in local medical services and also provided 15 boxes of medicine to nearby Hambantota Base Hospital.

This 400-bed hospital was the largest in Hambantota and also the only existing hospital within a diameter of 250 kilometers (155 miles). The hospital originally had 50 doctors, but the tsunami had killed two doctors and two nurses, putting more strain on the hospital's already insufficient manpower.

The hospital staff spoke of how in the first three days after the tsunami, over 900 patients had jammed the hospital, filling every inch of space in the building. Some seriously injured patients had been transferred to other places. Patients who stayed behind had to wait for a week before receiving any treatment, as all of the supplies from the central government had been used up so quickly. The Tzu Chi medical station helped bring much needed assistance to these patients.

Multiple roles of doctors and nurses

Many patients were suffering from upper trachea infections as a result of choking on water, so all the cold syrup was used up in under three days. Fortunately, the medical team had also brought with them many alternatives. However, for many of the younger patients, the pharmacist had to cut pills in half, grind them into powder, and add water to dilute them to the right amount. The whole process was very time-consuming and it was impossible to meet the demands of the waiting patients.



To prevent patients from becoming annoyed and impatient as they waited, Tu Ping-hsu, a deputy chief nurse from Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital who was helping at the pharmacy, suddenly had an idea: while shaking some medicine, he purposely shook it very forcibly as if he was making a cocktail. Laughter erupted from the children watching him, and for a moment or two this joy alleviated the misery of the waiting patients.

Dr. Wu Chao-chun also helped out at the pharmacy. When a particular medicine was out of stock and an alternative medicine had to be used, he would immediately notify all of the doctors. The pharmacists then did not have to run between the doctors and the pharmacy to confirm prescriptions, and instead they could concentrate their efforts on dispensing medicines to patients with as little delay as possible.

Fixed and mobile clinics

Surgeon Li Wei-che remembered 11-year-old Supun Tharanga very clearly. The boy had been pulled into the sea and swept along for two kilometers (1.2 miles) before being rescued. Rocks, lumber, and other debris had kept hitting him and caused a significant number of serious injuries. On the young boy's left hand, a large section of flesh was missing. When his father first accompanied Tharanga to the free clinic, the boy's entire body was covered with injuries, and a wound on his left elbow was cut open to the bone. He was also suffering from a serious infection.

When Dr. Li and an anesthesiologist tried to anesthetize the boy before treatment, three adults had to hold the struggling boy down. At every injection he received, Tharanga would let out a bloodcurdling shriek of terror.

This young boy, who could at first endure no pain, came the following day to have his dressing changed, and by the third day his fear had vanished completely; his mischievous behavior even made the doctor smile.

In addition to treating patients at the station, the medical team also carried out mobile clinics, so that they could help people who could not travel, and at the same time learn more about the survivors' lives in order to find out how to help them more thoroughly.

Doctors and nurses simply carried their medical kits with them to villages and neighborhoods and set up tables and chairs under trees or in the open to treat any patients who showed up. They also went to refugee shelters to see if anyone required their medical services.

Once when plastic surgeon Chang Chia-ning was treating a patient outside in the open air, the scorching sun was burning her scalp and she was sweating profusely. It was hard work, but Dr. Chang said that her sweating was more bearable than the patient's bleeding. If she could help the patient, her discomfort meant nothing.

Dr. Yang Chih-kuo of the respiratory therapy department noticed a woman with an emaciated face and grieving expression and knew instantly that the woman was suffering from severe psychological trauma. Her three children had been killed in the tsunami. The woman had not eaten in three days; sometimes she would weep inconsolably and at other times she would stay completely silent.

Dr. Yang gave her a sedative shot. While he was pondering what to do next, the manager of the company where the woman worked approached and said that he would like to pay for her future medical costs. The manager asked the doctor to prescribe all the necessary medicines and nutritional supplements so that he could continue to buy them later on.

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"We could understand the woman's grief," said Dr. Yang, "but I was touched that someone was willing to help her." He added that the medical services were only a temporary measure; what was far more important was that the survivors helped one another to overcome the tragedy that had affected them all.

Training local medical volunteers

Before the first medical team returned to Taiwan, the second team, composed of Tzu Chi members from Singapore and Malaysia, arrived to take over. The third team arrived from Taiwan on January 11. They too provided fixed-location free clinics and handed out 500 family-size medical kits.



Dr. Lin Shinn-zong, superintendent of the Hualien Tzu Chi Medical Center and the leader of the third medical team, estimated that since there was a limited number of medical kits and most people couldn't read the instructions in either English or Chinese, the best recipients would be people with a higher education, who could understand English. These people would then teach others how to use the kits properly and avoid the danger of misusing the drugs. Therefore, most of the medical kits were given to teachers.

Hambantota School, which was located right next to the Tzu Chi medical station, had 2,000 elementary and secondary students, of which 150 students, along with three teachers, were killed in the tsunami. Some of the surviving students would study at school in the morning and then volunteer at the Tzu Chi station in the afternoon.

On the morning of January 17, Dr. Lin, Ms. Huang Hsing-chao, director of administration at Yuli Tzu Chi Hospital, and Tzu Chi volunteer Lu Fang-chuan delivered the medical kits to the school. They first instructed K.S. Dilrukshi, a computer science teacher, how to correctly use the thermometer and the eight kinds of medicine contained in the kit before gathering all of the other teachers together in a classroom. Dr. Lin gave each one of the teachers a medical kit and, with the help of Dilrukshi's interpretation, explained to each of them how to use the medicines correctly.

Dr. Lin opened his mouth, bent his back, and demonstrated how to use the medicines for head-ache, sore throat, backache, cough, and other sicknesses. The combination of his explanations and body language allowed the teachers to master the kits very quickly. Dr. Lin even gave them a small test afterwards to test their knowledge, and all of them provided the right answers.

In the month between the end of 2004, when the first medical team arrived, and January 24, when the fifth medical team arrived, 85 medical professionals helped over 10,000 Sri Lankan people. Until local medical services return to normal, Tzu Chi will continue to provide its love

and service in this stricken country.

By Huang Hsiu-hua
Translated by Lin Sen-shou
Source: Tzu Chi Quarterly Spring 2005

Ананке " [все альбомы киша скачать](#) " решила, что Светлые силы не должны иметь никаких " [скачать игра блур](#) " дополнительных преимуществ перед Силами Зла уже потому, что они олицетворяют Добро.

Прекрасный " [шацкая настольная книга стервы скачать](#) " принц перерисовывал с глиняной таблички на пергамент " [Макс барских макс барских агония скачать](#) " модели греческих туник; не " [игра дикие птицы](#) " успело в поросшей лесом соседней " [скачать алхимию на компьютер](#) " лощине замолкнуть эхо последних ударов, как принца и след простыл.

Здесь была " [медиа джет последняя версия скачать](#) " приготовлена для духов легкая закуска.

Естественно, он не " [скачать книги невыносимая легкость бытия](#) " мог не заинтересоваться священниками, стоящими у истоков элишизма.

Я " [олеся николаева небесный огонь и другие рассказы скачать](#) " даже не уверен, можно ли меня " [немецкие песни на немецком языке скачать](#) " считать Каем Крапивником.

Нам она нравится, подтвердил Бабриэль.

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