

In Haiti, Tzu Chi Moves Free Clinic to National Soccer Stadium

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Two months after the earthquake devastated Haiti, Tzu Chi's relief work is moving ahead on several fronts – free medical care, distribution of food, blankets and tarpaulin sheets, preparations for a classroom and a visit to the president to tell him what they are doing.

The relief team decided to move its free clinic and aid distribution in the capital Port-au-Prince from its base at the OECC company to the national soccer stadium. On March 9, five volunteer doctors from the [Tzu Chi International Medical Association](#) (TIMA) set up a clinic on the halfway line: unsure what to expect, they were prepared for anything. An elderly woman stepped forward and Zhao Wenchang, a doctor of Chinese medicine, gave her acupuncture. "Relax, please relax," he said. "We often do this in Argentina, outside free clinics. The conditions are about the same – no electricity and no water." A woman arrived who had given birth to a baby boy on the street eight days before. "What is the problem?" said Dr Dong Mingzhe, from the United States. "It is diarrhea, the baby has diarrhea. Tell her that is all right. I will give her some vitamins, which she should suck." A man arrived with his wife, thin and weak. He explained that his wife, 26, had contracted AIDS a year earlier and brought her in the faint hope of a cure. The volunteers measured her blood pressure and found it was low, at 120/50. "Her heart is racing, she is malnourished and dehydrated," one said. "She needs to go to hospital." They realize that little can be done. AIDS is rampant in Haiti; so the volunteers came well prepared to treat patients. A woman came with her daughter; the doctors discovered that she had bronchitis. Without the visit, she would not have known. In total, the five doctors and one nurses, aided by 10 volunteer translators, treated 362 people during the day of the free clinic.

New TIMA members – Haitian Americans

Among the TIMA members were two new recruits, Betina Turner and Demitri Francois, both Haitian-Americans. They emigrated from the Caribbean island and returned to their native land to serve their fellow Haitians. Both are colleagues of TIMA doctor Yao Fansheng. "Dr Yao told me that he wanted to go to Haiti and asked if I wanted to join him," said Francois. "I said definitely, yes. He paged me on Saturday, I bought my ticket on Monday and here I am." A surgeon in Haiti, he switched to psychiatry after moving to the U.S. He offered both of these skills to the earthquake survivors, but it was a daunting task. "At times I felt overwhelmed. Can I really help these people? What can I do for them really? I have a feeling of being overwhelmed and of doing something good. It is a weird feeling. That is all I can say." Wearing her TIMA uniform, Turnier said that she was comfortable with the heat, despite the fact that the only shelter was a tent. "I was born in a tropical country, so I am fine. We have a good setting here. The weather has not been too hot or too humid." Like other volunteers, the two paid their own expenses to go to Haiti. Yao said that, in order to carry out mid- and long-term plans, they needed to recruit local doctors, as well as treat patients.

Having succeeded in the United States, Turnier and Francois have achieved more than most of their fellow Haitians. But they have not forgotten their roots and are happy to serve their homeland in its hour of need.

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