

Tzu Chi's Love Flourishing in Palencia

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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The treacherous mountain roads and monsoon season didn't thwart Tzu Chi volunteers' determination to bring medical aid to villagers living in seclusion high up in the mountains. 26 volunteers from Tzu Chi Guatemala Branch, wife of the mayor of Palencia and the Palencia City Hall support team and medics, all in all 48 of them, left for the Yerbabuena Elementary School in Palencia on the 26th of June to conduct a free clinic for the residents of Yerbabuena village and those of a neighbouring village, named Sansur.

As it is difficult for family cars to travel in the mountainous area, more so as the roads were slippery due to the monsoon season, the volunteers were transferred to more robust trucks prepared by the city council to make their trip into the mountains. But as each truck could only take a limited number of passengers, the volunteers arrived in Yerbabuena Elementary School two hours behind schedule.

From what they had learnt from the eight households who are long term care recipients of Tzu Chi, Tzu Chi decided to conduct a free clinic for all in the Yerbabuena village. Tzu Chi volunteers visit the families on a monthly basis despite having to spend one and a half hours for a one way journey. Through the extended interaction with the care recipients, Tzu Chi volunteers got to know that many other villagers are deprived of timely medical care due to inconveniences in transportation, and some of them didn't get any treatment at all. Their compassion for the villagers has led to the realization of the free clinic.



Ensuring timely treatment for all

Upon arrival, Tzu Chi volunteers sprang into action to set up the free clinic. They hoisted up the Buddhism and Tzu Chi flags as a means to inform all villagers about the free clinic.

As doctors are a rare sight in the village, one could see villagers coming in one after another with their children to seek treatment. The local women even prepared lunch for the doctors and volunteers in the school kitchen to express their gratitude.

The opening ceremony of the free clinic began at 9am and was attended by over 500 people comprising the medics, Tzu Chi volunteers and the villagers. The opening speech was short and concise so that the villagers could have more time to consult the doctors.

The free clinic offered consultation and treatment in three areas—dentistry, ophthalmology and general disease. To cater for women who came with their family members, two classrooms were transformed to consultation rooms for treatment of general disease with 13 doctors on duty.

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One of the doctors, Byron, examined a 4-month-old lovely girl and a preliminary diagnosis revealed that she has a congenital blood tumor. Dr Byron advised the mother to immediately send the baby to a major hospital in the city, or the tumour might grow and block her bronchi, suffocating her to death.



Sacrificing holiday to treat the sick

A dentist's job is a demanding one, which makes the fact that they were willing to sacrifice their holiday to participate in the free clinic truly admirable.

There are many children in the villages and their parents cannot afford to pay for their teeth extraction. As such, many children had gathered in the corridor outside the makeshift dental clinic early in the morning waiting to get their dental consultation.

While waiting to see the dentists, the volunteers taught the children a sign language song, "We are One Family", and explained to them in Spanish what the song is about.

Cuban medical team, Brigada Medica Cubana Operacion Milagro, was invited by the mayor of Palencia to participate in the free clinic. Juan Carlos Sanchez, the leader, shared that this was his second time participating in a Tzu Chi free clinic. This time, he had four ophthalmologists and five general practitioners scaling the mountains with him to bring medical relief to the poor and sick.

At the free clinic, four villagers were diagnosed to have cataracts. Under the arrangement of the Palencia City Council, they will be receiving free surgery at the eye clinic run by the city council.



Sincerity and prudence begets smiles from patients

Prior to the free clinic, the participating doctors first ascertained the types and quantities of medications needed for the free clinic and the procurement of which was later consolidated and carried out by the Tzu Chi volunteers. The doctors also brought their own medical equipment and tools as well as assistants to the free clinic. Though children tooth extraction is considered a small surgery, the dentists need to examine the children first and also administer anesthesia to reduce the pain, hence the need for assistants.

At the dispensary, the volunteers had already prepared adequate supply of medications for all the prescriptions from the doctors. Though there was a long queue, Tzu Chi volunteers helped to ensure orderliness and efficiency in the dispensing process.

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Volunteer Wu Caiyun gave each child his or her share of oatmeal, offering the poor children something nutritious. She also gave them biscuits as snacks. Volunteer Ji Wang then distributed small toys to the children, bringing happy smiles to their faces as they hardly own any toys.

A total of 512 cases were tended to at the free clinic. The volunteers were deeply touched too; though they are not doctors, they felt the joy of helping the others all the same by contributing in their own way to the free clinic!

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