

The first in-patient

One night in the orthopedics ward, Kao Wang Ho had trouble falling asleep. The 70-year-old matron was scheduled for surgery the following day, and thinking about it made her uneasy. She rang her bell throughout the night to summon nurses to her side for companionship.

Dr. Tseng Hsiao-tsu was on call that night. He knew that all the nurses were quite busy, and he decided to come to the ward to keep Kao company. Aware of her anxiety about the upcoming surgery, he spent the night on the bed next to Kao's. They chatted and he joked lightly with her to put her mind at ease. Soon, Kao fell asleep peacefully.



When Kao woke up in the morning, she was in good spirits. A hospital volunteer asked, "Did they take good care of you?" "Yes" Kao replied, "The doctors and nurses have all been very nice to me. I have no worries."

Two weeks earlier, Kao had fallen and fractured her right hip joint. When she went to seek treatment, her doctor informed her that her hip required surgery. Fearing the risks and uncertainties of a major operation, she hesitated. "I kept telling my family I didn't want the surgery. I couldn't conquer my fear even when my brother-in-law assured me that I shouldn't worry as the anesthetics would prevent any pain."

Kao's daughter, Ya-hui, said that their home was very close to the Taipei Tzu Chi General hospital. Every time she left the house, she could see the hospital nearby. When the hospital opened, she decided to take her mother in for an examination.

"I have a good impression of Tzu Chi because whenever major catastrophes strike, its volunteers can always be seen rendering assistance in the disaster areas. I believe that a hospital founded by Tzu Chi will give top priority to the interest and well-being of its patients."



After a series of tests--a blood test, an x-ray, an electrocardiogram, and an ultrasonic examination--doctors at the Taipei Tzu Chi hospital decided that although Kao was afflicted with diabetes and had a slightly elevated blood sugar level, it was safe for her to undergo surgery. With the medical issues resolved, all that needed to be done was to ease Kao's mind and relieve her anxiety.

"Dr. Tseng spent the entire night with me," Kao told the volunteer who came to see her. "He listened patiently while I poured out my worries. I was so touched by his care and dedication." Then she turned her head to face Dr. Tseng and said to him, "I have complete trust in you. I

know you will do an excellent job."

"I'll definitely do my very best," Tseng reassured her. This would be the very first operation in the orthopedics department. To ensure that everything would run smoothly, Tseng double-checked the equipment in the operating room. He scheduled the operation for Kao only after he made sure each device would work perfectly.

At 4:30 p.m. on May 9, Kao underwent her surgery, which lasted one and a half hours. Her operation was a success. Although the wound from the operation was still causing her pain, her heart was full of joy.

The first surgery

For seven days before the Tzu Chi Hospital formally opened on May 8, it provided free medical treatment as a way of giving back to the surrounding community. When Lu Ken-tien offered to serve as a Tzu Chi volunteer at the free clinic, he never expected to be the first patient to undergo surgery at the hospital.

After serving as a volunteer for two days, Lu began to feel ill. A day of rest at home did not relieve him of his abdominal pains. In fact, the pain worsened, and he checked into the emergency department of a hospital near his home.



The doctor told him he might be suffering from appendicitis and asked him to stay in the hospital so that his condition could be easily monitored. Because the Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital was opening the next day, Lu thought to himself, "It would be a pity if I couldn't take part in the opening ceremony. If I need an operation, why not receive it in the Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital?"

On the morning of May 8, Lu checked into the emergency room of the hospital. A volunteer who knew him joked, "This can't be a coincidence--you just want to test our equipment!"

After Lu underwent all the necessary examinations, doctors confirmed that he had appendicitis and scheduled an operation. Before the operation, Lu's anesthesiologist came to his side and explained, "After we go into the operating room, the medicine in your drip will help you fall asleep. When you wake up, you may experience nausea and dizziness. But don't worry, these are normal symptoms and we'll take care of you."

As part of standard pre-surgical procedure, doctors always explain how the anesthesia will be administered and any complications that might arise in order to help patients understand what will be happening and reduce their level of anxiety. Li Chun-yi, head of the anesthesia department, said, "We work with each patient closely to assess the risk of complications and to choose the best anesthetic method accordingly."

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The operation, performed by Dr. Wu Chao-chin, lasted 40 minutes. After the surgery, Wu visited Lu in his ward.

"Does the wound still hurt?"

"Not really," Lu answered with a smile.

"You have quite an endurance for pain!" responded Dr. Wu. "Your appendix was perforated and you had a white blood cell count of over 11,000, and yet you said you didn't feel any pain." Wu explained further that it would have been better to perform the operation earlier. Fortunately, the hole in Lu's appendix was covered by the small intestines and only caused local peritonitis.

Wu showed some pictures taken during the operation to Lu and his family. "This is a laparoscope. It has a very small lens at one end that enables one to see clearly. During an operation, the surgeon only needs to make three small incisions, no more than one centimeter wide, in the abdomen to allow for the passage of a laparoscope and other instruments to remove the appendix."

Wu said that a small catheter was still connected to an incision in Lu's abdomen. It would be removed three days later if everything went well. "We must be cautious not to infect the wound. Later in the day you may drink some water. If you have no problems drinking water, then you can have milk."

Wu said that if the traditional surgical method had been adopted, the wound caused by the operation would be as wide as five to six centimeters and it would take the patient longer to recover. "There are great advantages to laparoscopic surgery over traditional surgery."

The next day, Lu, accompanied by his wife, moved about outside his ward. "The union of technology and humane care--I can feel it here," he said.

The company of volunteer

The volunteers supplement the medical staff at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital. The doctors and nurses treat the patients' physical ailments while the volunteers provide a comforting and warm atmosphere.

Everyone is welcome at the Tzu Chi hospital. Smiling volunteers greet patients as they enter the hospital. Across the foyer, a large mosaic mural entitled "The Buddha Cares for the Sick" calms patients and inspires a sense of awe. On the escalator, soft melodies play and scenes of the night sky created by fiber optics further soothe each patient.



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On May 1, the first day of the free clinic, people started pouring in at 8 a.m. Many of the doctors who served at the free clinic came from the Tzu Chi hospitals in Hualien in eastern Taiwan and Dalin in the south. Yen Hui-mei, a senior Tzu Chi volunteer who established the volunteer service team for the Hualien Tzu Chi Medical Center, instructed the other volunteers as she provided assistance to the patients.

Chang Hsiao-ping and her husband came by bus from Hsinchu, over an hour away. A loyal Tzu Chi TV viewer, she learned about the free clinic and came to seek treatment. She said excitedly, "I recognize many doctors here because I've seen them on the Tzu Chi TV channel before."

Chang and her husband, Tsai Li-chun, each sought treatment in different hospital departments, she in cardiology and he in neurology. Chang, 71, suffers from hypertension and takes medicine regularly to keep her blood pressure under control. The doctor who treated her found her systolic blood pressure to be over 200. "It's probably because I'm too happy. My visit to the hospital today excited me so much that I couldn't sleep last night." Despite Chang's lack of sleep, she was in very good spirits and chatted happily with the volunteers.

However, her husband, Tsai, endured a long wait and was beginning to feel impatient. Two volunteers noticed his edginess and chatted with the couple to relieve them of their boredom. Chang told the volunteers, "My husband used to be an English teacher at a junior high school, and I was an elementary school teacher. We've both been retired for nearly 20 years now. After retiring from our respective jobs, we taught at a college for the elderly until last year when my husband had a minor stroke."



Lin Shinn-zong, superintendent of the Hualien Tzu Chi Medical Center, examined Tsai and determined that he might be suffering from hydrocephalus. "Don't worry about it too much. If it is only a slight case, the surgeon will perform a relatively simple procedure, inserting a catheter into the ventricles of your brain and allowing the cerebrospinal fluid to flow out and relieve the symptoms." Lin explained that Tsai's hydrocephalus had temporarily affected his memory, but that treatment should reverse much of that effect. Lin's explanation greatly relieved Chang, who had been worried that her husband might have been suffering from Alzheimer's.

After making an appointment with the doctor, the couple left with contented smiles on their faces. "The doctors here were very friendly," Chang commented, "and the volunteers that kept us company were so nice. At our age, going to a hospital can be a nerve-wracking experience, so this environment was especially comforting. There wasn't even that distinct smell of medicine that makes most hospitals so intimidating. We plan on coming back often in the future. Even if we are not here for medical reasons, we would like to serve as volunteers."

A peaceful mind is good for treatment

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Two patients and their families were chatting away comfortably on a roof garden outside the inpatient rooms. Lin Yi-chin, 70, lives in Taipei Tzu Chi. He collects and sells recyclable goods for a living. When he was riding his pedicart uphill one day, he accidentally broke a bone in his foot, and he was sent to the Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital for treatment.

The other patient was Chang Hsin-min from Yungho. He was admitted for treatment after a consultation with Dr. Yang Hsu-li, the head of the urology department.



A light drizzle was falling, but it didn't dampen these patients' spirits as they strolled in the garden. Chang told a volunteer next to him, "This is my first time in the hospital, and I'm so fortunate to have a room with a roof garden. Even though two other patients share my room, I still feel as if I were living in first-class accommodations!"

Chang continued: "Tzu Chi has really put in a lot of effort to ensure that patients are put at ease in a comfortable environment while receiving medical care. The natural lighting in my room is so good that I don't need to turn on the light during the day. It's also wonderful to have a roof garden so we can walk around outdoors and enjoy the fresh air."

Lin, who was sitting in a wheelchair pushed by his son, also said casually, "I injured my foot, so now I can take the opportunity to rest. The surroundings are so good that I feel like I'm on a vacation!"

More words, more warmth

As part of its goal of improving the relationships between patients and their caregivers, Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital makes efforts to provide education in many areas affecting quality of life. For instance, the department of metabolism has nutritionists who give nutritional advice, and the department of thoracic medicine has a hygienic education room where patients can acquire knowledge about the right way to use medicine.



Mr. Lo, 70, suffered from asthma and a chronic cough, so he came to the department of thoracic medicine for help. Dr. Tsao Chang-yao, deputy superintendent of the hospital, ordered an x-ray and an ultrasound examination and then prescribed some medicine for him. The doctor asked a respiration therapist to explain the use of the medicine to Mr. Lo in the hygienic education room.

Therapist Li Ying-min first took out an inhaler and told Lo that it should only be used in case of emergency. "When you feel your chest is tight, or you can't breathe, or you are gasping for air, you can use this inhaler. Simply inhale once and that should relieve the symptoms right away."

Li pressed on the inhaler once to make sure the device was working. Then she showed Lo the manual and demonstrated the correct procedure for using the inhaler. Lo learned to exhale completely, put the inhaler into his mouth, inhale slowly until he couldn't take in any more, hold his breath for 10 seconds, and finally exhale.

Li reminded the old man to keep the inhaler by his side at all times in case of emergency. She also cautioned him that if he used it three times in one hour but still felt tight in his chest or had to gasp for air, he should come to the hospital right away.

About the other medicine the doctor prescribed, Li explained, "This one is to protect your trachea and reduce inflammation. Use it once in the morning and once in the afternoon, and it will relieve your cough."

Li explained the use of the medicine in great detail, including when to use it and what side effects to expect. Li added, "If you use the medicine correctly, your problems should disappear within three to six months."

The old man's son was very satisfied with the treatment. He said, "If we didn't know the details, we wouldn't know how to help my father with his illness. We are very touched by the sincere care of the hospital staff."

Protecting neighbors' health

Mrs. Chang, who accompanied her 90-year-old father to the hospital, recounted her unpleasant past experiences with doctors.

It all happened within a few short months. First she had an operation to remove a uterine fibroid tumor. Then the doctor told her that her entire uterus had to be removed. Then, the complications appeared: she couldn't tell when her bladder was full, so she had to use a clock to figure out when she needed to go to the toilet. The nerves around her large intestine were also damaged, and she needed laxatives for her bowel movements.



"If the doctor had explained beforehand all of the complications that might arise from the surgery, I would not have felt so lonely in dealing with all of the inconveniences." Mrs. Chang said that doctors seem to worry so much about whether they are seeing enough patients that they do not pay sufficient attention to how the patient feels.

"I trusted my doctor and hoped that he would solve my problem, but he betrayed my trust when I was at my most vulnerable," Mrs. Chang said as tears rolled down her cheeks.

Her husband added, "Most hospitals don't make people feel warm, and the medical procedures

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have become so formalized that there is no human feeling involved." However, he had high hopes for the new Tzu Chi hospital. "When I saw the sign, 'Guarding Life, Health and Love,' I felt it spoke my mind. I had new hope that this hospital would become our good neighbor and do its best to protect our health, and that the doctors would truly treat patients as their own family members."

He said that when he first stepped into the emergency ward of the hospital, he heard a volunteer singing to a patient. "It felt so different." He had accompanied his father-in-law to many emergency wards before, but he had never felt as much warmth as he did at the Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital. "The hospital has a large force of dedicated volunteers to back it up. I hope they will help promote the best and most attentive care for patients."

"Gratitude," "respect," and "love" are the words of reminder that Master Cheng Yen gives to the medical staff of every Tzu Chi hospital. The opening of the Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital symbolizes the beginning of new responsibilities and possibilities. The hospital has a duty to carry out its medical care with love, to serve the public, and to live up to its expectations.

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