

## Ten Years of Healing

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
Thursday, 18 September 2008 00:00

---

For the past ten years, the Tzu Chi International Medical Association has been bringing relief to a suffering world. The compassion given by association members is visible on the faces and in the bodies of those who have benefited from TIMA's help: patients walking confidently unassisted, their sight restored, just a day after their successful cataract operations; children previously enfeebled by malnutrition growing healthier by the day after receiving dietary supplements; and people who used to shun medical care now willing to consult with physicians on the treatment and prevention of chronic disease.



The above are just a few examples of how TIMA is working to improve lives around the world. This organization of volunteer medical professionals is now entering its second decade, and while its approaches have evolved over the years, one thing remains constant: its resolve to provide free medical care and hope to the needy in all corners of the world.

In August, the Tzu Chi Jakarta branch held its 51st free clinic in Singkawang, a community located on the western side of West Kalimantan Province in Indonesia. One of the locals taking advantage of the free medical care was 55-year-old Jong Thian Kong. He held the hand of his wife, Ratifah, as volunteers checked her in for a follow-up appointment. She had lost her sight 14 years before to cataracts, and she had undergone surgery just the day before to remove them. While there, Jong also had to help his two daughters, also suffering from cataracts, receive the same surgery.

Jong was the first person that Ratifah wanted to see when the bandages over her eyes were removed. She could hardly wait to see him again! But when the bandages were finally removed and Ratifah looked at her husband, she could hardly believe her eyes. The man looking back at her seemed like a stranger, a far cry from the husband that she had pictured in her mind's eye for the past 14 years. Ratifah wondered what might have changed his looks so dramatically.

Laboring on the farm to provide for his family and tending to their daily needs had taken a visible toll on Jong. After all, he alone had cared for his entire family since his daughters had lost their sight more than a decade before. He now had many more wrinkles and far fewer teeth than his wife remembered. "Is this really you, Jong?" Ratifah murmured.

Jong's family story was depicted in a video clip presented at the annual TIMA conference held in September 2008 in Hualien, Taiwan. The attendees, more than 300, were deeply moved as they watched the gift of sight being restored to the family. At the same time, their joy for the trio's cure was muted by the knowledge that the family had suffered unnecessarily and for so long at the hands of a minor medical condition. They knew that if the family had lived elsewhere, they could have been cured a lot sooner.



## Ten Years of Healing

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
Thursday, 18 September 2008 00:00

---

### **TIMA--A well-oiled model of compassion**

Dr. Lin Chin-Lon (林進隆), convenor of TIMA, succinctly summed up members responsibilities in a speech during their annual conference in September: "Access to medical care is every person's right, and it mustn't become the exclusive province of the rich. We at TIMA intend to bring medical care to those who need it, wherever they may be."

The association celebrated its tenth anniversary this year. It is now based in 58 locations in 11 countries. Over the years, more than 6,000 volunteer medical professionals have provided free medical services in more than 1.4 million patient visits (or 140,000 patient visits a year). To put this statistic in perspective, a typical 700-bed major teaching hospital in the United States might have 60,000 70,000 patient visits in its emergency department in a year.

TIMA physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and medical technologists are supported behind the scenes by a large group of capable volunteers. These volunteers provide the indispensable services that make any field clinic run smoothly. Time and again the medical and non-medical teams make for a potent combination that enables effective clinics to relieve the needy of their suffering.

TIMA free clinics offer other services in addition to performing those services normally found in a typical clinic. Advance teams choose suitable patients before the clinics to receive TIMA's precious but limited resources; a logistics team transports medical equipment and pharmaceuticals from place to place or between countries, and then sets up treatment areas and routes; and there are methodical but personable ways to track and bring patients back for follow-up visits.

Dr. Zhou Yoo-cheng (周育成), superintendent of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, recently returned from a TIMA free clinic held for cyclone victims in Myanmar. He understands that there is a limit to what any individual, however capable and loving, can do. But he also appreciates that an individual's ability to contribute is greatly enhanced as a volunteer on a TIMA mission. This is because the tried and true association model minimizes the snags that take time and resources away from patient care. Each clinic runs as smoothly as a well-oiled machine. Since each mission is so organized and methodical, the medical professionals are freed from worrying about the operational logistics and can focus on doing their utmost to help patients.

### **The evolution of TIMA**

As TIMA's membership expands, so does the scope of its services. It has worked out the kinks and has become very proficient in offering mobile clinics, and it now offers services in more specialties than ever before. As part of this evolution, the association is also offering more services in the area of preventive care. This is having a profound impact on patients' lives. In fact, preventive care was the predominant theme of this year's conference in Hualien. Knowing that a sensible lifestyle can go a long way toward warding off disease, association members want to stop diseases before they have a chance to start.

In addition to expanding the scope of services, each TIMA chapter has evolved to specifically meet the unique needs of each local population that it serves. In Taiwan, for example, medical resources are quite accessible to most citizens because most people have medical insurance

## Ten Years of Healing

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
Thursday, 18 September 2008 00:00

---

through the national government. Thus, TIMA members in Taiwan have been able to expand their services to include wellness check-ups, awareness education, and consultations. These are all in the realm of health maintenance and illness prevention.

Of course, TIMA in Taiwan continues to offer the "traditional" services that it has offered in the last decade to the needy. These are people that live on the geographic or financial fringes of society. They are the homeless wandering on the streets, the bodily disabled, the mentally challenged, or people in transition. They exist in Taiwan as they do in any other countries, rich or poor.

In Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and the United States, Tzu Chi offers permanent free clinics or dialysis centers where the poor can obtain free services regularly year round. If need be, these TIMA clinics can draw on the facilities and wealth of expertise of the six Tzu Chi hospitals in Taiwan. Over the years, some of the more complicated cases have been referred to Tzu Chi hospitals in Taiwan.

---

### Indonesia

In 2003, Tzu Chi Indonesia built Great Love Village I for people who had been living in illegally built dwellings along the Angke River. As with previous Tzu Chi villages elsewhere, this one offered an on-site clinic to care for the health of the residents. Now in its fifth year, the clinic has been upgraded to a small hospital staffed by TIMA physicians. They continue to serve patients from the village, but also help those in need from outside as well, regardless of where they live.

There are some vacant residential units in the village set aside as temporary quarters for out-of-town patients and their companions, much like a small-scale Ronald McDonald's House. This has saved patients from outside the village a great deal of time and transportation costs.



Qiu Shuang-ying (邱雙英) is a Tzu Chi volunteer from Indonesia. He says that Indonesia's country districts usually have only small clinics, and those are usually staffed by the most recent medical school graduates. The new doctors, still wet behind the ears, have little firsthand experience with patients and are equipped to treat only the mildest ailments. Anything more serious, such as cataracts, hernias, and thyroid tumors, must be referred to larger medical facilities in nearby cities--which presents a whole new set of challenges.

Just to get to and from the cities for medical care presents a problem to the poor. Although they work hard day in and day out, they can barely eke out a living. Any time not working is time off without pay. They can't afford to be ill. To them, getting sick is a luxury reserved only for the rich.

Although big cities provide medical subsidies to the poor, such financial aid is scarce, highly

## Ten Years of Healing

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
Thursday, 18 September 2008 00:00

---

selective, and time-consuming. There are just too many poor folks competing for the same slice of the pie. It's not surprising that relatively few people obtain medical care this way. Most of the poor simply go without treatment and suffer.

In response to this deplorable situation, TIMA volunteers in Jakarta, Makassar, and Bandung have held 76 free clinics in the past nine years. More than 80,000 patient visits have been made by those most in need in Indonesia. In addition, in 2006 volunteers started a five-year project to tackle childhood malnutrition and promote planned parenthood. Once a month, volunteers go to Great Love Village I and distribute milk powder and vitamins to more than 200 undernourished children. Volunteer Qiu said, "I am thrilled to see the kids gain weight by leaps and bounds."

This is compassion in action, helping to alleviate the suffering of those most unable to get help any other way.

### Singapore

TIMA Singapore has been working with local communities to provide services in both Western and Chinese medicine. Cases are referred to the Tzu Chi Free Clinic for further treatment if necessary. Tzu Chi volunteers serve patients with the utmost personal attention and care. For example, after a free clinic, if need be, volunteers make home visits to patients and make sure that all is well.

Some TIMA physicians suggested offering surgery in addition to health check-ups during free clinics. Qiu Jian-yi (邱建宜), coordinator of TIMA Singapore, acknowledged the validity of such suggestions, but local laws made it impossible for association members to perform surgery at clinic sites. Undaunted, they carried on without surgery--which proved to have unexpected benefits. Without the possibility of surgery, doctors grew to appreciate the true significance of check-ups and in-depth consultations. Through those sorts of services, they were able to unearth additional complaints or ailments not initially revealed to them. The doctors discovered that once patients became comfortable with them, they would begin to open up and talk more.

### The United States

Tzu Chi members in the United States have been providing medical services to the disadvantaged for a long time. The Free Clinic in Los Angeles was opened 15 years ago, long before TIMA was officially established. Dentistry, internal medicine, and Chinese medicine have recently been added to the center's menu at reduced rates. Their hope is to help alleviate patients physical pains while lightening the impact on their pocketbooks at the check-out counter.

Zhang Fu-ju (張福聚) is a doctor of Chinese medicine who has practiced in California for two decades. He observed that there are many illegal Mexican residents in the region with no access to medical help. Over the years, TIMA USA has been providing services to help them. Chen Xin-gong (陳新公) is another Tzu Chi doctor who specializes in Chinese medicine. He pointed out that medical care is financially out of reach for many people in the United States, even though it is considered a wealthy nation. This fact is not lost on Tzu Chi people in that country. They are doing their best to bring their services to those who need it.

## Ten Years of Healing

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
Thursday, 18 September 2008 00:00

---

Zeng Ci Hui (曾齊惠), deputy CEO of the Tzu Chi Medical Mission in the United States, observed that the increasing number of patients at the free clinics organized by the foundation in that country reflects a society under financial siege. She said that TIMA USA is planning to step up its efforts to partner with local social service departments and medical facilities to deliver medical assistance to more people under stress. It is currently working with hospitals in the Los Angeles area to help females facing unplanned pregnancies.

---

### A TIMA doctor

With a 12-kilogram (27-pound) medical kit on his back, plastic surgeon Ye Tian-hao (葉天豪) visited many heavily damaged villages in Sichuan, China. Ye hails from Taiwan, but was busy making house calls, checking to see how he could help. His "house calls" were actually to patients living in tents. Their homes had been destroyed by the strong earthquake that devastated Sichuan on May 12, 2008.



One girl that Ye visited had suffered a broken ankle. Unfortunately, his medical kit necessarily contained only the most essential items; he had no plaster of Paris or fiberglass to make a cast for her. So, the good doctor improvised. He asked villagers to get him some wood boards, cardboard, and towels, and made her a splint good enough to keep the broken bone from moving. He told the girl to keep the cast on for two months until the bone healed. When Ye returned to Sichuan a month later with another free clinic mission, he brought plaster of Paris with him. He sought out that girl and replaced the make-shift cast with a real one. This gave her much more freedom to move around.

Free clinic missions are often organized in the wake of natural disasters. This is when the need is highest. Ye has participated in ten free clinic missions overseas in the last five years, in such places as Indonesia, the Philippines, Pakistan, and China. Like other Tzu Chi volunteers on such missions, he pays for all his expenses, such as lodging and transportation.

Ye went to Indonesia four times in a two-year stretch to help. People waited in long lines to be treated. Although they varied greatly in age, they all had one thing in common: a cleft lip. One in 700 babies born have a cleft lip, making it the most common birth defect in the world. In the United States, corrective surgery is generally done when the baby is between 10 and 12 weeks old. But these folks in Indonesia weren't so fortunate. Some of them had suffered a life of humiliation and ridicule for their deformity. However, they considered themselves lucky, because they were among the fortunate to be finally receiving the operation at all. No wonder some of them put on their best clothes for this life-changing occasion.

"I operated nonstop on one patient after another, and so did my fellow surgeons, said Ye. "It is a simple job for us, but it has the potential of changing the patient's life for the better." He wished

## Ten Years of Healing

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
Thursday, 18 September 2008 00:00

---

that he had a thousand hands with which to operate all at once.

When Ye is not out of the country on a mission, he makes a point of spending time with people in Taiwan who can use his help. He visits communities with other volunteers to promote health maintenance, preventive care, and healthful lifestyles; he treats patients in their own homes; he cleans filthy houses for owners who can no longer do it themselves; and, if need be, he stands in as an assistant to another surgeon so an operation can proceed smoothly. He goes anywhere he can help and does whatever he can.

Naturally, his volunteering takes time away from his own medical practice and cuts into his income. But he cherishes the opportunities to do good deeds, and he participates in free clinics whenever he can. The thrill of helping others comes far above the lure of making money.

Dr. Ye's altruism is representative of the rest of TIMA's membership. There is no lack of physicians like him in the association.

---

### What keeps them going?

At the annual conference in Hualien this year, many TIMA members shared what had kept them going over the years.

Yang Wei-shun (楊偉順) is from Zamboanga, Philippines. He had just come from a TIMA-sponsored free clinic, held specifically for cleft lips and cleft palates. He shared that experience with other people at the conference.

Most of the patients Yang saw at that clinic were teenagers. Some of them had dropped out of school, unable to take the derision from their classmates. Most of them were from poor families and had never dared to dream of the day when their deformed lips would be healed and made whole.



The mother of one young patient told Yang that she felt heavenly joy when she saw her child rolled out of the operating room. Another mother said that she had stopped crying for her son after the surgery, and she had just allowed someone to take a picture of her son for the first time ever.

Yang has organized and participated in many similar Tzu Chi free clinics. He also took part in the establishment of the Tzu Chi Rehabilitation Center and the Tzu Chi Great Love Eye Center in Zamboanga. "All those efforts involved a lot of sweat and toil by many Tzu Chi volunteers," said Yang. "But when we see how we've been able to bring hope to patients and improve their lives, we feel that all that hard work and personal sacrifice was worth it. We'll hold firm to our commitments and try to help more people in the future."

## Ten Years of Healing

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
Thursday, 18 September 2008 00:00

---

Ruth Oni Angriani Atmadja (吳安) and Kurniawan Tjahajadi (吳安), former and current superintendents of the Indonesia Tzu Chi Hospital, both attended the TIMA conference. Ruth is Christian, but feels entirely at home working at Tzu Chi. "Master Cheng Yen teaches compassion and benevolence. These are the goals of all religions. I don't feel that my work with Tzu Chi hinders my beliefs at all. On the contrary, I feel that it allows me to live more fully as a Christian."

After a three-year term, she passed the superintendent's baton to Kurniawan in 2006. Ruth continues to do what she loves to do: helping TIMA plan large-scale free clinics, relief distributions, and medical and health awareness programs in remote areas.

Kurniawan used to practice medicine on a small island. The indigenous population there lived a simple life, and the time spent on that island was his happiest. When he left the island to work for a large hospital in Jakarta, he found the joy of treating patients gradually diminish. He came to the conclusion that practicing medicine in a large city was not his cup of tea. Luckily, he was able to rekindle his love for medicine when he came to the Indonesia Tzu Chi Hospital. He enjoys treating people in need at places few other physicians are willing to go. He cherishes the frank, from-the-heart interactions between people in remote areas.

Two years ago, Kurniawan went with other volunteers to Yogyakarta, Indonesia, to help earthquake victims. A grateful and gracious patient picked bananas from his trees (the only thing he owned after the earthquake), steamed the fruit, and offered them respectfully to the doctors. It is warmth such as this that has kept Kurniawan volunteering year after year.

### Pressing on

The need for free clinics shows no sign of abating. On the contrary, the need for free medical care is continually increasing. "We are not unduly discouraged," said Dr. Lin Chin-Lon. "A patient served is a life saved. We must do our utmost to carry on our mission." He implored TIMA conference attendees to press ahead, to spread love, to promote disease prevention and healthy lifestyles, and to help the needy regain the strength and confidence to stand on their own again.

As medicine advances and new technologies develop, people are getting better care at medical facilities. But even in advanced countries, there exist dark corners inhabited by poor, needy people. In such areas, TIMA members will continue to extend love to the suffering and help them toward a better future.

Compiled by Li Wei-huang and Qiu Ru-lian  
Information provided by Liang Miao-kuan, Lin Wei-xin, and Yu Jian-xing  
Translated by Tang Yau-yang  
Tzu Chi Quarterly Winter 2008