

Articulate Mentors

A Retrospect on The Tzu Chi Standardized Patient Program

By Kao Sheng-Po

Director of the Tzu Chi Standardized Patient Center and Attending Physician in
the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital





The Tzu Chi standardized patient program was launched in March 2006. The photo shows Dr. Wu Yung-Kang and Dr. Wu Kun-Chi demonstrating in person the proper interactions between doctor and patient to the volunteers.

When you or your family are ill, can you accept a medical intern with poor communication and physical examination skills pressing on you or your family's body? If your answer is negative, or you are hesitant to answer, has it ever crossed your mind that the meager opportunities these medical interns have - unlike drivers who can practice in driving schools as much as they want before taking the test—before stepping up to the frontline and start saving lives?

Patients are the best teachers, period. They allow medical interns and

new medical staffs to practice and acquire proper medical skills. However, when the environment does not provide learning opportunities to these novices, how are we to expect these future medical professionals to produce satisfactory services?

You may not know that, at home or abroad, there is a group of people who are neither patients nor actors, but are willing to accept acting lessons in order to portray themselves as real patients in facial expression, body language, tones, and knowledge of diseases. They

can accept poor diagnostic skills and physical examination of the students, and remain consistent in appearance and disease-related responses in spite of the inadequate these interns are clinically, so that every one of them may receive a fair chance; these performers would also respond with feedback after a class or exam according to students' or examinees' performances, giving them a chance to rectify mistakes while remain confident. These feedbacks can enhance the motivation and assertiveness of each and every examinee, and guide them in becoming competent medical professional in empathy and skills.

These “non-actors”, known for their consistency and accuracy in their performances that always meet a certain standard, are called standardized patients. Because of their tolerant and systematic feedback resemble that of an ideal educator, Master Cheng Yen referred to these standardized patients in a morning assembly as “articulate mentors”.

The Tzu Chi standardized patient program was organized and implemented in March 2006 by Dr. Wu Yung-Kang. With no guidelines to follow and no resources at hand, he assumed the pivotal responsibility of this medical education reform. Fortunately, near hundred Tzu Chi volunteers nationwide rallied by Sister Yen Hui-Mei assembled at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital on March 12, 2006, and under





In April 2013, the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) of the licensing examination for standardized patient officially incorporated the qualification examination for step 2 medical licensing examination. Standardized patients were subsequently employed in the examination of registered nurse, nurse practitioner, and medical staff.

the guidance of several clinical instructors, DaAi T.V. director Hsiao Chu-Chen, and the valiant effort of the medical students, the first team of “articulate mentors” that integrated the four major missions of Tzu Chi - Charity, Medicine, Education, and Humanities - was born, setting a precedent in Taiwan where volunteers

assume the roles of standardized patient.

These Tzu Chi volunteers were by no means professional actors. However, they willingly and contentedly accepted instructions from medical and acting professionals, without any prior knowledge of the matter and without any monetary rewards, work hard to meet

the standards of professional actor. They were prepared to allow medical students to make inquiries and perform physical examinations on them for no reason other than selfless devotion to medical education. By that pure and adamant thought alone, these mentors overcome obstacles from home, from work, and from their missions, prioritize the study and tests of standardized patient program above all else. They know that education cannot wait, and even more so for lifesaving medical education.

This thought of selflessness had brought innovative changes to the medical education of Tzu Chi that led to a steady advancement of its standardized patient program. During a standardized patient workshop held by Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital in July 2006, attending scholars from medical centers worldwide praised the achievements of Tzu Chi and its program. Many medical schools and colleges began to follow Tzu Chi's footsteps and recruit hospital or church volunteers to perform as standardized patients. They also invited Tzu Chi to share its experience regarding the standardized patient program. A tidal wave of reform in medical education soon swept across the medical field in Taiwan.

The reform of medical education by Tzu Chi went beyond the success of its standardized patient program and the recruitment of volunteers. For the longest time, the progress of medical

education in Taiwan depended on either hiring foreign scholars to speak, or by experience sharing among medical schools, the two sole sources which new medical knowledges were acquired and teaching strategies and plans based upon. Not only is it likely to cause biased or fragmented concepts and fails to construct a comprehensive view, it can also be detrimental to the consolidation and advancement to the overall medical education. The standardized patient program in Taiwan was faced with such predicament at the time.

On a medical convention in March 2008, Master Cheng Yen mentioned a reference to the term standardized patient made by Dr. Tony Jer-Fu Lee, dean of the college of life science. Few days after the convention, Master Cheng Yen had a hour long conversation with Dean Lee in a chance encounter. Few days after that, Dean Lee delivered an excellent news—he had arranged Dr. Hsieh Ming-Chen and I to attend a week-long standardized patient workshop at Southern Illinois University.

Since the workshop was comprehensive in terms of concepts and practical training, soon after my return to Taiwan I held a two-day standardized patient workshop in June 2008 that was designed with both theory and practice. The workshop has helped over 200 educators from over 20 schools to date.



A book launch was held in Sept. 2013 for “Mastering Standardized Patients”, a book that compiled seven years of Dr. Kao Sheng-Po’s practical experiences. He drew on the volunteers’ effects of bruises and bamboo stab wounds. (Photo shows articulate teacher Ms. Hsieh Mei-Lin)

As the training program of standardized patients and trainers in Taiwan gradually matured, in April 2013, the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) of the licensing examination for standardized patient officially incorporated the qualification examination for step 2 medical licensing examination. It was a significant reform in the history of Taiwan's medical education. A major facilitator, or facilitators, behind the successful reform were the articulate mentors across the nation.

With the success at hand, the ministry of health and welfare went a step further. It launched a subsidy program for the expenses of teaching hospitals that included all nine medical categories, applied the education and evaluation of standardized patients on all medical personnel to ensure medical quality and patient interest. All these accomplishments could be traced back years ago to the altruistic dedication of the numerous standardized patients.

The confidentiality agreement in the



The sixth Tzu Chi medical education day was held on Nov. 5, 2016, which coincided with the ten decade anniversary of the standardized patient center, where international scholars were invited to share their views and experiences, and Tzu Chi standardized patient volunteers participated to acquire new knowledge.



To prepare for the examination of Post-Baccalaureate Chinese Medicine, Tzu Chi University, the instructors of Chinese medicine from all six Tzu Chi hospitals assembled to discuss with the standardized patients. Top: Dr. Lin Yu-Ning (right) from Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital and Dr. Shen Yi-Ying from Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital; bottom: Dr. Lin Ching-Wei(1st right) from Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital and Dir. Chen Chien-Chung(2nd right) from Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, and Ms. Hsieh Mei-Lin.



The seniors of Post-Baccalaureate Chinese Medicine, Tzu Chi University awaits the examination. Examiners will be present when the students diagnose their patients in the consulting room, while the observing examiner will be in the back of the room and observe through a one-way mirror.

standardized patient criteria, however, prohibited these articulate mentors from disclosing the nature and details of their acting to a third party, which includes friends, relatives, and even families. No one knew of their involvement and contribution, and the secrecy had led to frequent misunderstanding and disgruntlement from their families, coworkers, and fellow volunteers. Been wronged by others did not waver the resolution of these articulate mentors, as they continued to fulfill their commitment contentedly for the sake of medical education.

In 2016, a decade after the launch of Tzu Chi's standardized patient program, an opportunity was taken not only to retrospect the history of the program, but to pay tribute to these discreet contributors. Without the altruistic and valiant giving of these articulate mentors, the reform would have no been possible. Their noble deeds are no less than the silent mentors and their great sacrifice.

With these words I would like to express my immense gratitude and appreciation to the contribution of these mentors, as well as the courage of Dr. Wu Yung Kang to take on the responsibility alone. The prosperity we see today in the progress of standardized patient program in Taiwan would not be if not for them. I hope in the coming decades to train more



Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital also invited standardized patients to participate in the training of new pharmacists and nutritionists.

medical personnel excelling in profession and compassion, in order to live up the expectations and sacrifices of Dr. Wu and the numerous mentors.

I would like to take the time to thank again for everyone's commitment and dedication. Thank you!