

Emergency

Relief for

Myanmar Influenza Outbreak

By Huang Hsiao-Chuan, Liao Wei-Ching, Chen I-Chien, and Tzu Chi volunteers



Tzu Chi Medical Foundation organized an Influenza Control Team to Myanmar for experience exchange. The Team visited the First Yangon Medical College and exchanged experiences with Professor Zaw Wai Soe (6th from left), Director of Emergency Medicine, Minister of Health, and several Medical Doctors. The Tzu Chi Team included (from left): Dr. Tang Kiat Beng from Malaysia TIMA, Dr. Ho Cheng-Maw, Infectious Diseases Dept. from Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, Dr. Hou Chung-Hung, ER medicine of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, Chien Sou-Hsin, Supt. of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, and Dr. Lin Chin-Lon, CEO of Tzi Chi Medical Foundation.



Medicine and medical materials assembled in Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital. Supt. Chao You-Chen (center, back) directed colleagues to paste the Tzu Chi labels.

In July 2017, Type-A influenza outbreak attacked Myanmar. By August 12, 583 persons were hospitalized and 23 people died among the 221 confirmed cases. From the end-of-July to the middle of August, Tzu Chi Foundation in Malaysia, Myanmar and Taiwan quickly responded to the crisis by supplying masks, gloves, isolation gowns, screening agents and applicable medicines. Meanwhile, a Tzu Chi medical team led by Lin Chin-Lon, CEO of the Medical Foundation, and Chien Sou-Hsin, Superintendent of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, was dispatched to Myanmar to help control the epidemic.

Request for Tzu Chi Assistance; Swift Assembly of Medical Supplies

Nargis typhoon in May of 2008 resulted in the most damaging natural disaster in Myanmar history. Tzu Chi volunteers organized a relief team to provide necessary assistance. The H1N1 influenza outbreak started in July of 2017. From July 21 when the first confirmed case was reported near the Ayeyarwady River to July 31, over 100 patients were hospitalized.



Dr. Hou Chung-Hung (left) from Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, worked till very late the night before the team depart, in the emergency room. Volunteers presented apples to him to wish him luck.

The Ministry of Health and Sports conducted an emergency meeting on August 1st to organize an Emergency Relief Team. According to The Global New Light, a Myanmar daily newspaper, procedures to isolation of infected patients, medicine, and supplies were detailed and proposed by Zaw Wai Soe, head of the Emergency Medicine for the Ministry of Health and the Yangon Province Epidemic Prevention Commander. On August 2nd, Zaw asked for help from Tzu Chi for their experience as well as supplies to protect the front line medical professionals.

In a very short period of time, Tzu Chi Foundation prepared 3,689 kg of instant

rice to support the medical professionals in Myanmar. Meanwhile, volunteers in Malaysia assembled over ten thousand pairs of medical gloves and 40,000 (N95) face masks. In Myanmar, volunteers collected about forty thousand pieces of general purposes masks. Medical supplies were assembled at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital from all over Taiwan. This included 3,500 flu capsules, 2,000 anti-epidemic isolation suits, 840 bottles of hand sanitizer sprays, 140 instant flu screeners and over 200 forehead thermometer guns.

Chao You-Chen, Superintendent of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital pointed out, “The flu outbreak in Myanmar is very serious.

Seeing their people suffering is really heartbreaking. Therefore, as soon as we received a request for assistance from their government, we started preparing all the anti-epidemic materials. At the same time, Tzu Chi personnel contacted our Department of Health and Welfare to clear the necessary papers so they can be delivered to the disaster area in the shortest time.” Wu Ching-Hui, Director of

General Affairs of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, indicated, “In order to be environmental friendly, we use the original manufacturer packaging instead of Tzu Chi. However, to avoid mishandling via shipment, Tzu Chi logos were pasted on all of the boxes for identification.” By the afternoon on August 8th, all relief materials arrived at the airport, ready to be shipped to Myanmar.



Local volunteers from Myanmar came to the Tzu Chi built school and donated masks, dry hand sanitizers, and other disease prevention materials.

Sharing Taiwan Experience

At 7 am on August 10th, CEO of the Tzu Chi Medical Foundation, Dr. Lin Chin-Lon, led the Tzu Chi Medical Relief Team to travel to Myanmar. Team members included Supt. of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, Chien Sou-Hsin; Dr. Ho Cheng-Maw, Infectious Diseases Dept.; Dr. Hou Chung-Hung, ER medicine. Lin indicated, "Because local community lacks the experience of epidemics prevention, they need our help. Taiwan has accumulated experiences through years of fighting influenza, SARS, etc. The important part is the initial screening. Isolation is a must once fever is detected. The facilities for isolation are equally important. We hope our experience in epidemics prevention can be of significant contribution to slow or stop the spread of the epidemic."

Dr. Hou Chung-Hung was in Yunan, China, in 2016 for relief distribution. This is his second trip for international disaster relief activity. He worked till 8 pm the night before departure at 2 am the next morning. Hou pointed out that his main responsibility for the trip was to share the Taiwan experience in fighting the epidemic. This includes proper techniques to enter and exit the hospital, and to screen suspects based on body temperatures. Chen Jin-Cherng, Vice Supt. of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, praised Hou for taking on such an important task, and wished him well for the trip.

Travel to Taiwan for the Silent Mentor program

The Medical Relief Team, accompanied by Dr. Tang Kiat Beng from Malaysia, a Tzu Chi member, rushed to Myanmar in the shortest time. As soon as they landed, they went directly to the North Okkalapa General Hospital to discuss emergency planning with the Superintendent of the hospital. After that, Tzu Chi Medical Foundation Lin, briefed the Principal of Yangon Second Medical College, U. Aye Tun. Lin encouraged the College to establish an exchange program with Tzu Chi.

The team then travelled to the First Medical College. There, they were welcome by Professor Zaw Wai Soe, Director of the Health Department, and 10 other doctors from the college. Zaw told the team that seasonal common cold is not unusual for the locals. Usually, they do not take flu shots. However, the outbreak came without any warning this time. That caused casualties. This episode really educates us to face the problem seriously, and to establish an effective system to fight the virus. Zaw said, "Thanks for the helping hands of Tzu Chi. I came across Tzu Chi because I have treated children that were helped by your organization. Tzu Chi also helped us design the Orthopedics Hospital. That helped many patients in Myanmar."



Director Wu Mi Han presented a certification of appreciation to CEO Lin Chin-Lon, at the Donation Ceremony for diseases prevention materials.

Both of the First and Second Medical College mentioned about the Tzu Chi Silent Mentors program. The all wish to come to Taiwan to witness the process, so that students can learn how to practice humanity medicine with utmost respect. Hopefully, Myanmar will have a branch of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA).

Climate Change is the Main Reason of the Outbreak

While waiting to meet with the Director of Myanmar Ministry of Health, arrangement was made for the medical relief team to visit Kemaryna Samantha Temple School. Arrangement was

also made to communicate with three public hospitals in Yangon. During the ride to Thanlyin Township of Southern Yangon, Dr. Tang Kiat Beng presented his experience of voluntary medical services with the Malaysian TIMA. Dr. Tang also discussed the local living conditions and told the team many touching stories about their interaction with patients. The junior nuns of the Kemaryna School welcome the Taiwan medical relief team with poetries, and hand-sign songs. The team also expressed interest in their schooling and living conditions.

The Dingqin Bell Public Hospital has about 800 beds and around 600 medical professionals. The statistics of the flu outbreak were shown on the hospital's white board. But there were no records of receiving any flu vaccine. Dr. Daw Than Hla indicated that there was insufficient preparation for the flu outbreak. When the attack occurred, there were problems in support with adequate supplies. Fortunately, thanks for the helping hands of Tzu Chi and charity organizations all over the country, the damage is minimized. Dr. Yadanar Yyaw is a renounced specialist of respiratory diseases and the only expert in influenza research in the country. In her view, climate change is the main reason for the flu outbreak. And, many deaths from the flu were because of the lack of timely flu shots.

After visiting the Yangon Orthopedics Hospital and the Cardiology Department of the Yangon People's Hospital, the medical relief team concluded that their major task was to confront the shortage of medical resources and medical hardware. The situation cannot be changed overnight. They can only utilize whatever they have and come up with a solution for the problem they are facing. In the long-run, the Taiwan experience is a good help for Myanmar.

Donation of Epidemic Prevention Materials, Appreciation of Local Leaders

On August 12, the Tzu Chi Medical Relief Team visited Yangon Central Hospital to evaluate suspected H1N1 patients, as well as to study the process of isolation and transitional care. As soon as an infection is detected and confirmed, a patient is then transferred to Wabagi Specialist Hospital by ambulance. Upon arrival at the new hospital, the patient, physician and the nurse all stay behind and the ambulance is sanitized before returning to the Central Hospital for new assignment. There are 190 such emergency ambulances nationwide in Myanmar.

After practicing the designated isolation procedures, Dr. Ho Cheng-Maw shared, "The process and the flow

are basically fine. However, the actual simulation details are not perfect. If the medical resources can be improved, the team can take more patients. The medical resources can be acquired either from the government or other organizations."

Supply of medical materials and exchange of professional experiences are in high demand for the Myanmar health personnel. During the ceremony of epidemic prevention material donation, Director Wu Mi Han of the Yangon Health Department and many local professors were attentive to the Taiwan approach in emergency medicine and infectious disease control. Supt. Chien Sou-Hsin of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital first presented the practical medical mission of humanity medicine. CEO Lin and Dr. Hou then followed with sharing on SARS experience, isolation process, body temperature screening, flu education that are practiced in Taiwan, and the importance of using animation in health education.

Director Wu Mi Han said, "Myanmar has been receiving continuous support from Tzu Chi ever since the Nargis wind disaster. Your helping hands always arrive in a timely manner. With your testing agents, we are able to sort out the types of diseases. You also provided precious hand sprays and thermometers. The instant rice is so delicious. I just tasted them a little while ago. They not only

provide the energy, these tasty vegetarian foods also encourage our people to help others. With Tzu Chi's generous donation, I will make sure to take good care of our people and put the materials to good use."

Supt. Chien said, "Even though Myanmar is far away from Taiwan, but because of the connection to Tzu Chi, we will deliver relief materials to the needy, regardless of country or race. The positive attitude of the government and local leaders encourage us to do our best to control the disease as soon as possible."

CEO Lin Chin-Lon said gratefully after

returning to Taiwan, "I am deeply touched during this trip realizing one's blessing through seeing the hardship of others. We fully appreciate the comfortable living we have in Taiwan. Members of our relief team and our citizens in Taiwan have free flu shots as compared to medical professionals in Myanmar who cannot afford flu vaccine, do not have enough masks, and short on isolation gowns. In addition, the area is so crowded; they are really confronting many technical difficulties in diseases control. We sincerely wish them solving their problems one step at a time."

Director Wu Mi Han of Yangon Health Department (standing) received the Tzu Chi Medical Relief Team and listened to the Taiwan experience s in disease control and screening and isolation processes.

