



Love is Universal !

By: Lee Yi-Kung, Director of Emergency Medicine, Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital

“The mission of an ER physician is to show up in the disastrous scene.” I heard the voice soon as the news of Mexico earthquake arrived. Without hesitation, I applied for a Mexico visa and was ready to go.

The first time I participated in the Tzu Chi International voluntary medical services was in 2003. That was when the Bam Iran earthquake near the end of 2003 leveled the entire city and killed tens of thousands of people. Thereafter, I provided medical services after the Southern Asia Tsunami in 2005, the 311 Japan earthquake induced tsunami in 2011, the 2013 Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in the Philippines, and the 2015 Nepal earthquake. As an ER doctor, I am committed to the Tzu Chi Disaster Relief Team.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen once said that in order to participate in the disaster relief efforts and do good deeds, one must be well prepared and in good health. Since I had experienced severe sickness



before, I felt strongly for maintaining good health. I keep running routinely and participate marathon, just to keep my body strong so that I can answer the call whenever needed.

We departed from Taiwan early December of 2017 and arrived in Mexico after 12 hours of flight. That was my first time in the country. In Taiwan, from the news media, we had the impression that safety in this country is questionable and people here take things for granted and not very reliable. On the contrary, we found people here are warm and deeply appreciative.

Special Encounter in Church

Our first scheduled relief distribution was on December 7, 2017. Unexpectedly, we were informed that the distribution venue was "already booked". Everything was ready to go except the venue. What can we do? What followed was a miracle. It enabled me to witness the wisdom and persistence of the Tzu Chi disaster relief team.

During a meeting with the local mayor, Brother Stephen Huang, Head of the Tzu Chi International Volunteers, commented that he was extremely angry without a venue for the distribution. "We do not blame you," said Huang, "We can only blame ourselves for not well prepared ahead of time. It will be a huge loss if the distribution cannot take place tomorrow."

Stephen left afterwards, and several responsible volunteers continued talking to the mayor. By saying those words, Stephen's intention was to leave room for the mayor to figure a way to conduct the planned event. Later that day, when the volunteers were dining in a local church, they found there were boxes of unopened medicines donated by the public. By the afternoon, the problem solved. The message "already taken" was just a misunderstanding.

As for the undelivered medicine, I figured we could use during our first relief distribution. However, the earthquake occurred three months ago so medicines might not be the top priority at the current time. In addition, all those medicines labeled in Spanish would take us a long time just to understand them.

When I turned my sight back to the piles of medicines again, my priority reversed. Our original plan was first a free clinic followed by supplies distribution. Why didn't we make best use of them? At any rate, there are U.S. pharmaceutical manufacturing plants in Mexico so these products are made with US standards. I volunteered to be a one-time guest pharmacist to categorize them for use the next day.

With such thinking, we fully utilized the venue and held our first free medical clinic concurrently with our first relief distribution. What a miracle arrangement! When the first few events were



successfully completed, our volunteers and the local people established excellent mutual trust. The subsequent activities were then smoothly accomplished. All these accomplishments were triggered by the first misunderstanding - "rented venue". At the conclusion of the entire mission, we still had leftover medicines so we donated to the church as our blessing.

Not Just the Medicines, Love is Most Effective

"I could not sleep at nights. The earthquake destroyed my house. I am still living in the ruined house. I am afraid that it will strike again while I am sleeping. I am afraid! I am worried about not able to afford to rebuild my house." Those were the words of a ninety-plus who came to the clinic. She has high blood pressure and diabetes. Even though the illnesses are multiple, fortunately, medicines are available. She kept talking for half an hour until her eyebrows smoothed and the corners of her mouth lifted. Finally, I presented her with a souvenir embroidered with the word "LOVE" and gave grandma a big hug.

Grandma walking away happily made me feel good. I did not have to give her any new prescriptions.

Normally, depression peaks six to eight week after an earthquake. It is especially so when the quake occurred

right before a major holiday, like Christmas. However, my observation from this trip proves the contrary. I found the atmosphere was full of love when we were there. I think this is because the Tzu Chi volunteers not only gave them materials and supplies, more importantly, we also provided strong psychological and emotional support.

During the days in Mexico, I also find out some problems with their healthcare systems. Basically, in this country, public healthcare is the mainstream. But, it is not very efficient. Most of their citizens have medical insurance to visit doctors. But they have to pay for their medicines. Therefore, healthcare is still a heavy burden for the average citizen. After the earthquake, many people became unemployed, and therefore lost their medical insurance. These people have to pay their medical bills out of their own pockets. Others, like farmers, maintain their insurance but still have to pay for the medicines - a heavy burden. The Tzu Chi free clinic delivered free medicines for people with chronic illness such as high blood pressure and diabetes. These greatly help them to sustain hardship after a damaging earthquake.

There was an old woman with last stage cervical cancer came to the clinic accompanied by her family members. "The hospital told me it is in the final stage, it is metastasized, and it is hopeless. They sent me home." The lady was so sad, and



Dr. Lee Yi-Kung, Dr. Yeh Tian-Hao help Pharmacist Marta de Meza classifying the medicines and working as temporary pharmacists after treating patients.





On December 8, at the second free clinic, Dr. Lee Yi-Kung (center) treated patients with Argentina Tzu Chi Volunteer Pei Wen Wang(left) as translator; on the right is Pharmacist Marta from Paraguay.

the only thing I could do was to comfort her with kind words. Her whole body was in severe pain, I could only prescribe her with some pain killer. “Whatever you said is not important. What is important is to listen to what she said.” A warm hug and a lucky ornament are more effective than any medicine.

Accompanying and psychological support are the best medicine in this moment. People smiled when they see lucky ornament with the words “愛” and “LOVE” They willingly took out the small amount of money they had and dropped them into the Tzu Chi Bamboo Bank.

Increase of Patients, Addition Line to Accommodate

There are three types of patients at the free clinic. The first kind is chronically ill patients. The attack rate for these patients is very high. Women over thirty year old tend to be overweight. This may due to their diets. They consume a large amount of soda, corn and other high sodium foods. The second type of patients comes to seek second opinions on surgery. Finally, the third kind of patients is of emergency nature, such as severe pain.

With the arrival of the Tzu Chi USA medical and the widespread of the news coverage of the free services, the number of patients increases rapidly. It jumped from tens to the hundreds. In order to accommodate a large number of patients, we had to adjust our workflow.

The first step of our clinic is to categorize the patients. There are three areas of the clinic, namely, dental, Chinese and Western medicine. The western medical area treats more complicated cases and usually takes more time for treatment. Therefore, I decided to add a special station for three types of patients. The first type is for patients with simple medical needs, such as offering vitamins or painkillers. The second type is for patients needing urging treatments, such as cuts requiring stitches, fainting while waiting in the line, and heart attack. Finally, the third type is for the handicapped or disabled.

There were many bright and warm scenes during our distributions. There were people in the crowds in the receiving end carrying their letter of appreciations. Some people also deposit small changes in the plastic bottles to share with the other less fortunate people.

Love has No Boundaries

During my Mexico trip, I received so many warm hugs from the local people. The number far exceeded what I had received in my entire medical career.



The wife of Dr. Lee Yi-Kung also felt the warmth of the Mexican patients. She said in her Facebook she was jealous and her fans left encouraging word about Dr. Lee's Mexico trip. Photo from Dr. Lee's Facebook.

In Taiwan, our patients show their appreciations by giving us their home grown fruits. They are bashful in showing their gratitude and shy to express their thanks with body language. But in Mexico, the situation is totally different. People here reward the doctors with a bright smile, some even cried and everyone leave us with a memorable hug. Medicine has no borders.