

Kisses, Hugs, and Blessings from Syrian Refugees

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A group photo of the TCM team. Starting from the left is Dr. Wang Wei, Dr. Wu Sen, Nurse Ho Yu-Ling, Dr. Tsou Mu-Fan, Tzu Chi volunteer Yu Mei-Yun

The living condition of the Bedouin tent area.



I have never thought there would come a day where I would bring the concept and therapy of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) to a place that takes a 16-hour-26-minute flight, crossing over five time zones, 8,219 km away from the center of Taiwan.

This place is called Jordan. Jordan is located on the north-west end of the Arabian Peninsula, known as the heart of the Arabic world, bordered by Syria to the north, Iraq to the east, Saudi Arabia to the south, and Israel and the Palestinian West Bank to the west. The name of the country, or the region it is located in,

appeared to be tainted with the smell of war, and shrouded in the mystery of the Arabic world. It is not a place where one can reach easily, the Syrian refugee camps in particular, as they are off limit to outsiders.

As one of the first graduates from the School of Post-Baccalaureate Chinese Medicine of Tzu Chi University, I, a rookie, was so fortunate to earn the opportunity to take part in a Jordanian medical outreach organized by TIMA Taiwan in my first year working in the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Division of Kuanshan Tau Chi Hospital.



On July 23, 2018, at the Tarabot Community Center, Dr. Wu Sen Treating a Syrian refugee male with acupuncture. This is this man's first acupuncture experience in his whole life.

This was a medical outreach where I experienced so many of my first times: My first time in a overseas outreach, first time visiting a country that has a culture so dissimilar from my own, and the TIMA TCM team's first time holding a medical outreach in Jordan. So many eye-opening first times built up to a high degree of uncertainty, overwhelming me with anxiety. Thanks to the team, though, my anxiety was soon relieved. Dr. Wu Sen, an experienced veteran in medical outreach and a doctor proficient in both skill and

virtue, reminded me of numerous details to attend to during the outreach, as well as acupuncture points that would achieve fast results, allowing me to remain calm and collected when facing my patients. Yuli Tzu Chi Hospital Nurse Ho Yu-Ling, equally experienced in medical outreach, visited Middle Eastern Countries before and could speak a little Arabic, with amiability matched by competence, acted as the pivot of the team and sped up the overall operation. And Dr. Wang Wei from Henan who is currently residing in Jordan



The lady from Azrap Refugee Camp kissing and blessing Dr. Tsou Mu-Fan.

participated in the outreach, shared with us his experience as a local doctor, and served as the respected Arabic translator. I was grateful for such a solid team that demonstrated the spirit of unity, harmony, mutual love and joined effort.

I stared at the itinerary many times prior to our departure, trying to imagine through those descriptions what it would be like once we are on the ground, the Bedouin camp, or the Azraq camp. When I finally arrived, I could not help but being shocked by the harshness of the environment. It was way more backward than I had imagined. The tents of



As a female doctor, Dr. Tsou Mu-Fan (left) won the permission of the conservative Syrian Muslim refugee to relieve her pain with acupuncture.

the Bedouin Nomads could barely shelter them against wind and snow. The cloth tents held only by wooden frames, and blankets on the gravel serves as seats to sit on and beds to sleep on, the life here was not the life of exotic simplicity that many youths today dream of. It is a life plagued by suffering, pain, and illnesses.

The considerable day-night temperature variation, the prolonged time spent laying down, as well as multiple pregnancies for women and hard labor for men, combined together to result in high percentage of joint pain and even joint deformity among local residents.

I was grateful for these local residents and refugees for giving TCM, something they had never heard, a chance to treat their diseases. At the Azraq refugee camp, a lady who walked all the way from the fifth camp, was experiencing severe joint pain in both shoulders that kept her awake at night, and the limited the range of motion that came with the pain made wearing clothes on her own a daily challenge. After receiving acupuncture therapy, the pain in her shoulder joints subsided, and her arms could move through a range of motion closer to that of a normal person. She told Sister Lili, our translator, with tears in her eyes, "I did not go to school. I don't know much. I don't know how to show my thanks." She then spoke for three minutes non-stop in Arabic, which Sister Lili translated in one

sentence, "She just said all the thanks and blessings she has ever known." When I removed the needles from her, she articulated all her gratitude with a warm hug and blessing kisses on my cheeks. The overwhelming feelings that stirred in my heart were beyond words. That was when I experienced the heartwarming joy of altruistic giving. During my time in Jordan, I received numerous kisses, hugs, and blessings. They gently swept away the fatigue I felt that came with pressure.

Our time in the Azraq refugee camp was limited due to camp policy. We had to fight against time by packing and treating patients simultaneously. The heartache of leaving patients behind and the weight of walking away burnt a black and white image into my heart that illustrated a tale of indelible despair.

Prior to the free clinic at the refugee job center, Sister Yu Mei-Yun led everyone to sing the Tzu Chi song, "Prayer", to pray for a smooth operation to help as many refugees as possible. Tears streamed down from the corner of my eyes as I sang along. I had never hoped with such sincerity that our prayer and resolution could be heard by the heaven that all the patients that came today with pain and suffering would return in joy; that I could perform to the best of my ability, replacing the sadness and gloominess on their faces with a sunny smile. It was at that moment did I understand the

vow we swore when we wore the white robe, “Whenever eminent physicians treat an illness, they must quiet the spirit and settle the will, they must be free of wants and desires, and they must first develop a heart full of great compassion and empathy. They must pledge to devote themselves completely to relieving the suffering of all sentient beings.”

Jing Si Aphorism says, “Cultivate blessing by serving others, cultivate wisdom by learning while serving.” This medical outreach in Jordan granted me the opportunity to cultivate my blessing

and wisdom through action, gave me a glimpse of the meaning of “The Great Compassion gives happiness to all living beings, and the Great Mercy eradicates the sufferings of all living beings,” and a taste of compassion and mercy by relieving the suffering of others. I brought the blessing of countless people to Jordan, and returned with the blessings to countless more to Taiwan. I believe a spectacular affinity such as this can be transformed into a never-ending drive that propel me forward on the path of a TCM practitioner.



On July 23, 2018, after the free clinic, Tzu Chi medical team members welcome Hassan bin Talal (center) for the signing ceremony of Tzu Chi and Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization.