

# *Wishes Granted*



## Regarding the Cognition and Actions of Clinical Nursing Professionals to Fulfill Wishes for Patients in Taiwan

People always procrastinate on their dreams, until impermanence arrives – diseases. Regardless of how busy they are, nurses always want to fulfil the dreams of the terminally ill patients, big or small, Helping their dreams come true to fulfill their last life journeys...

**By Wang Shu-Chen , Vice Director, Nursing Department, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital**

Throughout the life span of growing up, one always makes some wishes - a birthday wish every birthday, a new resolution every new year. In recent years, there are also many movies reminding us to complete our wish list before death. However, as each ordinary day passes, many wishes are not completed as if that is normal. What if “illness” occurs, resulting in hospitalization, then the urgency of completing wishes becomes a rush.

As those who work in the hospital, our mission is to protect life and health. In fact, we often hear or see that in addition to our medical mission, and quite a few nurses voluntarily help to fulfil patients’ last wishes. This motivates us to understand better terminal care process. Therefore, we need to study patients’ expectation and the participation statistics of our staff for death wish fulfilling experiences. Exactly 1,674 copies of electronic questionnaires were collected from six Tzu Chi Hospitals’ nursing staff for the following study.

### **Increase Understanding of Patient-Oriented Comprehensive Care**

The first question to our nursing staff was if they would actively inquire patients’ expectations during their routine care. About 58.5% would and about 28.3% rarely asked and 13.3% did nothing. If based upon this background statistics, minus the outpatient (12.7%) and the operating room (7.6%), the rate of actively inquire patients’ hospitalization expectation should be higher.

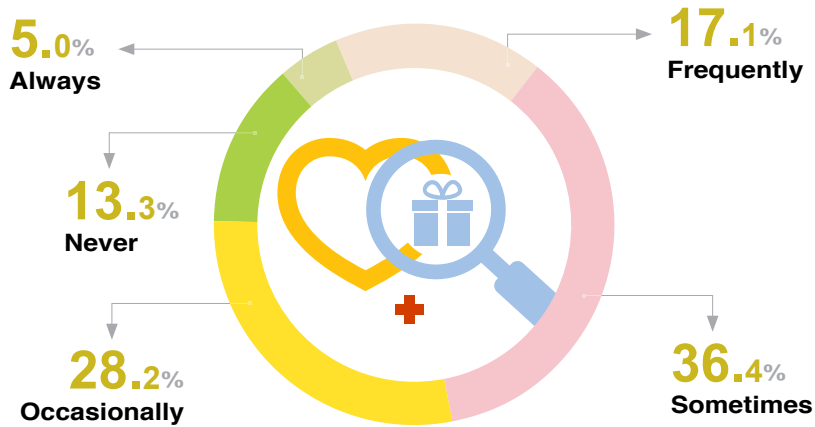
In 2006, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital started promoting humanoid map whole-person care education, and the other Tzu Chi hospitals follow the education model. Through the preparation of the humanoid map case reports, many nursing staff got to understand

### **Basic Statistics**

Gender	Number of People	%
Female	1,584	94.6
Male	90	5.4
Total	1,674	100.0
Age	Number of People	%
under 20	67	4.0
21~25	641	38.3
26~30	256	15.3
31~35	222	13.3
36~40	240	14.3
above 40	248	14.8
Total	1,674	100.0

Nursing Level	Number of People	%
N	588	35.1
N1	247	14.8
N2	633	37.8
N3	142	8.5
N4	64	3.8
Total	1,674	100.0
Job Title	Number of People	%
Registered nurse/nurse	1,372	82.0
Deputy head nurse	53	3.2
Head nurse	57	3.4
supervisor	18	1.1
Functional unit/case manager	47	2.8
nurse practitioner/senior RN	127	7.6
Total	1,674	100.0
Department	Number of People	%
Internal Medicine	332	19.8
Surgery	257	15.4
Pediatrics	74	4.4
Obstetrics & Gynecology	57	3.4
Intensive Care & ER	346	20.7
Functional Unit	13	0.8
Kidney Dialysis	49	2.9
Operating Room	127	7.6
Outpatient Clinic	212	12.7
Palliative Care	40	2.4
Administration	30	1.8
Psychiatry	56	3.3
Others	81	4.8
Total	1,674	100.0
Hospital Working Experience	Number of People	%
Within 1 year	323	19.3
1~2 years	257	15.4
2~3 years	182	10.9
3~5 years	262	15.7
5 years and above	650	38.8
Total	1,674	100.0

**Q1 | Have you actively inquire patients' expectations during routine care? ( N = 1,674, single choice )**



their patients better. Instead of focusing only on patients' diagnosis, they have better understanding of patients' overall situation including their livelihood with families, their economic condition, mental status, etc. Clinical nurses feedback that most hospitalized patients would "want to go home". However, we don't know their thoughts behind this "wanna go home". After further investigation, we found that he/she wanted to go home earlier to take care of his/her embedded family, or worrying about his/her vegetable garden... Through this thorough whole-person assessment, hospitals can then provide more comprehension care.

**88.5% Had Participated in Patients' Wish-Fulfilling, Nurses Wouldn't Mind to Spend Extra Time**

A second follow-up question asked if additional care outside of regular medical routine was provided to complete patients' wishes. 67.6% responded, "Yes, I have provided additional care." Of the 67.6%, 24.8% responded "always" or "often." 20.9% responded "Rarely" but they have also expressed that they have done extra care before as well. In total, 88.5% responded that they have done extra services outside of medical routine care to complete patients' wishes. 11.5% (193 people) selected "never", which ended the survey.

With more than 20 years of clinical experiences, I have known nurses that often go extra miles to help complete patients' wishes, for example, some terminal-ill patients want to attend family wedding parties or graduation ceremonies. Some patients are inconvenienced by hospitalization because hospital is not their home. They wanted to eat their favorite

foods or maybe just read daily newspapers. During hospitalization, patients' wants may be big, difficult, or just a small desire. For example, once a patient wanted to take a look at the Qixingtan, the beautiful eastern Taiwan beach. The wish may be simple but because of the patient's condition, a group of medical staff is required to first prepare the equipment: wheelchair, oxygen supply, medication, etc. Furthermore, another group of people is required for transportation and logistics. A simple wish needs everyone to contribute.

Of the 1,481 samples, we asked if the six Tzu Chi Hospitals nursing staff have used extra time to help patients fulfilling their wishes. Only 10.8% of the people did not use their personal time. 89.2% of the nursing staff have had this experience. Although 38.1% chose "Occasionally", those that chose "Always", "Frequently", and "Sometimes" combined equals to 51.0%, indicating that half of the people used their time to help patients with their wishes.

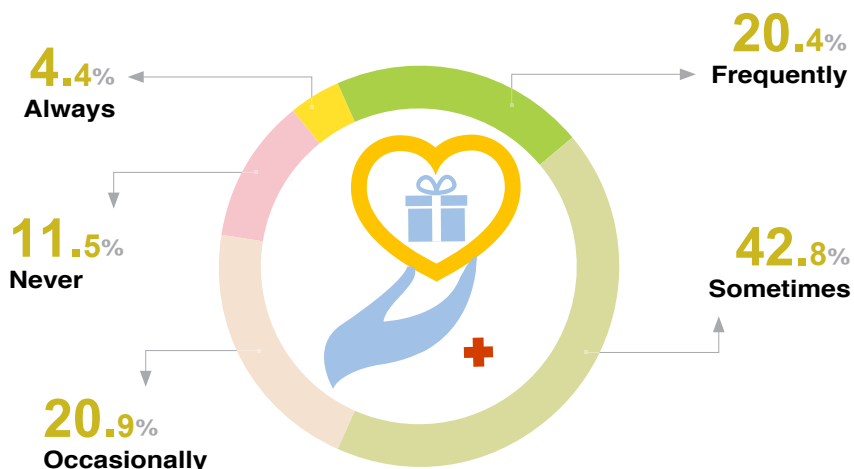
### Variety of Wishes Fulfilled with Peace of Mind

We asked nursing staff to select the activity they have participated in completing a patient's wish?

Based upon our experience, we provided a list of 10 choices in this question. The highest percentage was 45.4% of "Contact his/her family or friends", 37.2% of "Help to bring/buy food", 12.8% of "hold a birthday party", and 9.1% was "Body donation". Meanwhile the other choices were not as popular. Of the 23.1% that chose "other", six Tzuchi Hospitals' staff have helped to complete a variety of wishes: whether it was to take

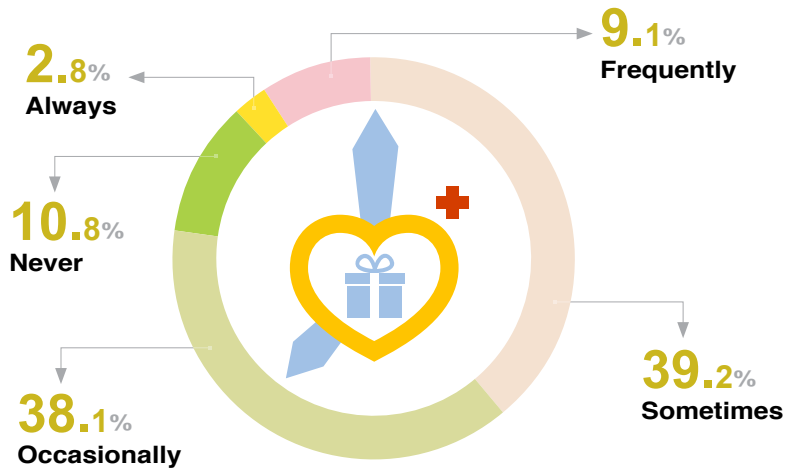
Q2

**Other than routine medical care, have you ever provided patients extra help to fulfill their wishes?**  
**( N = 1,674, single choice )**



# Q3

## Have you spent extra time to help fulfill patients' wishes? ( N = 1,481, single choice )



family portraits, accompanying them on vacation, completing commemorative albums, going to concerts, making overseas phone calls, or bring them newspapers and magazines... Most people may think that these should be the nurses in the palliative care wards would do since patients are preparing for their end of life. In fact, all the other department nurses had also participated in these activities. As far as I know, even an outpatient nurse would attend a patient's wedding. An operating room nurse had assisted a patient to make phone calls to the family to resolve homesickness...

A nursing staff once asked me, "Are these extra tasks required in addition to the daily clinical work?" I'm already so busy." In addition, intensive care unit nursing staff commented that their patients are rarely awake so there is no chance for them to complete patients' wishes. However, from time to time, we've heard that some nurses from some departments assist patients for their final wishes.

A patient's wish may sometimes need to be facilitated by the administrative department. For example, a patient of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital's Heart Lotus Palliative Care Ward's dying wish was to meet the governor and another patient in the pediatric ward wanting to meet a basketball player. In such scenarios, other departments would be needed to help.

In the pediatric ward, patients are mostly students. Once they are admitted, their studies interrupted. Therefore, "continuing schooling" may be their wishes. The pediatric ward of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital has created diplomas for patients who have finished chemotherapy. Nursing staff with education experience may volunteer to help tutoring. Furthermore, most of the patients in the respiratory care center cannot speak, nurses use

paper and pencil or gestures to communicate. One patient wanted to listen to concert, so nurses listened to music with the headphones with the patient...

Of course, if the patient's "unreasonable" requests, rather than the wishes for the progress of the disease, nursing staff need to have the ability to refuse. How to decide, it is another effort.

### Seizing the Moment with Love Is the Best Care

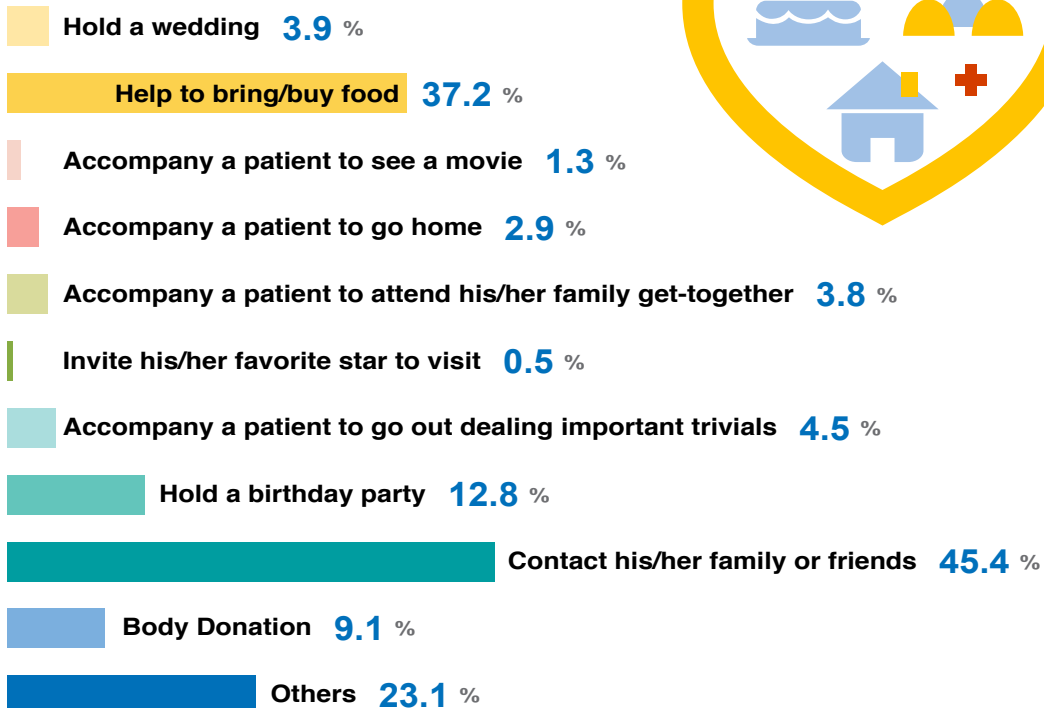
According to Maslow's theory of hierarchy, one must satisfy the low-level physiological and security needs before achieving higher satisfaction, and the highest level is self-realization. Many patient wishes are actually carried out in the course of nursing work. More importantly, many patients believe that when nursing staff care for them, they also provide spiritual care as well. Therefore, spiritual care does not necessarily mean a ritual of language or religion but rather "Seizing the moment with love is the best care."

Is it a meaningful job to fulfill wishes for the patient? 80.4% of people agree, of which

Q4

**Please choose the activities you had done for your patients for their wish-fulfilling?**

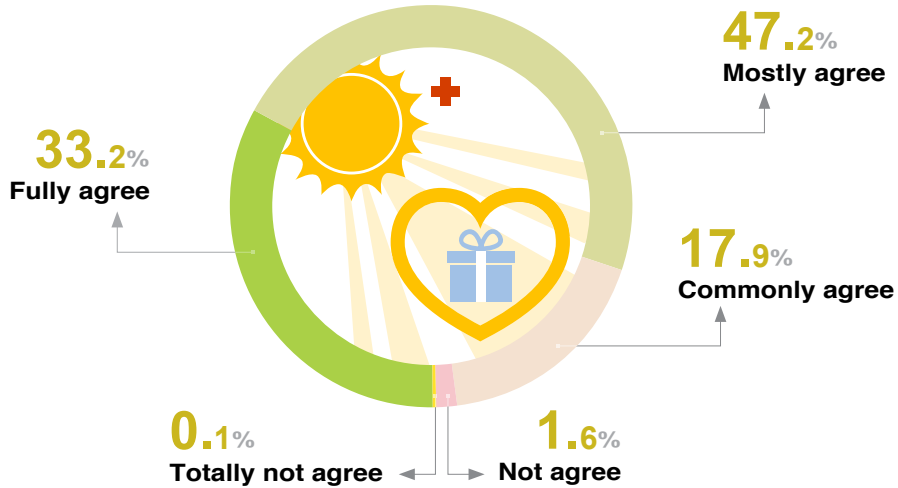
( N = 1,481, single choice )





# Q5

**Do you think it's meaningful to help patients fulfilling their wishes? ( N = 1,481, single choice )**



33.2% fully agrees. A few that does not agree was only 1.7%.

I have encountered a terminal patient who repeatedly expressed wanting to die early for fear of dragging down the family. After consultation with the Heart Lotus Palliative Care Ward team, this patient offered to take the team members to visit his hometown. After surveying his rice field, patient showed a satisfied smile and said that his heart was fulfilled. In the process, his family members participated together and had good memories.

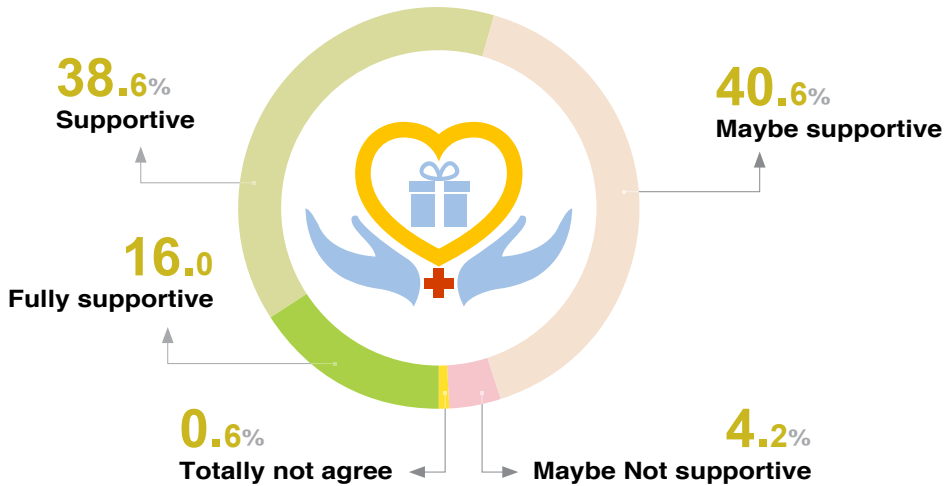
### Peace of Mind for Family and Comfort for the Caring Team

A final question was how supportive the team feels to complete patients' wishes. Response was less than 5% negative; the team that felt definitely supportive was 54.6%. In fact, most of the activities required to complete a patient's wish required many people to participate. Take our Heart Lotus ward as an example. A patient said to a nurse that he had never been to the Taroko Gorge and that he heard from friends that it is beautiful and wanted to visit. However, the patient was frail and had breathing issues. In order to accompany him to the mountain at high level, many preparations were required. As a result, the team mobilized a team of four nurses, a doctor, and a psychologist on board. They prepared a rehab bus, planning the routes, and emergency preparation, etc. For those nursing staff that could not come along, they prepared sushi and miso soup at home to assist the trip. Upon returning to the ward, the patient said that it was very satisfying, and the family expressed that it was an unforgettable moment.

Sometimes a patient's wish was hidden behind words or expressions, and the team needed to investigate to find ways to have the patient open up. In addition, sometimes

# Q6

**When you propose an act to help fulfill patients' wishes, how supportive is your medical team? ( N = 1,481, single choice )**



“finding” a wish for the patient can also stimulate the will to survive. Neurosurgical Ward Head Nurse Yu Chia-Lun shared that a young father with a brain stem injury was awakened in the intensive care unit and found that he could not move his limbs below his neck. He attempted to commit suicide by biting his tongue. Once in a regular ward, a nurse accompanied the patient on wheelchair with his respirator down the corridor. When he looked out outside the window, he mentioned that he usually go to work with a cup of coffee. The nurses made a promise with him, “As long as he can breathe on his own; they can go to have coffee together.” This patient took her words to proceed with rehabilitation. The nursing director said, “When we went to the rehabilitation ward, we made a promise to go have coffee together and sing a song.” This promise is about to come true since he can lift his hands and feet. He just needs to strengthen his voice, and practice singing...

It must be mentioned that for everyone in Taiwan, the plan of life should include an “advanced directive”. The patient’s rights law became effective on January 6, 2019, it reminded everyone of us to consider make our medical care plan in advance. Through pre-established “Advanced Care Planning” counseling clinic, family members and medical staff can understand the patient’s medical wishes. This is an important method allowing an individual to complete one’s final wish. People always think about the “future” and procrastinate, and they are used to delaying their wishes. When the impermanence of disease arrives, plans for life may need to be reorganized and even rely on others for help. For the nursing staff, we are willing to fulfill patients’ wishes and for their families. Because, when we voluntarily help patients fulfilling their wishes, we are actually realizing the value of our nursing profession and the value of our life.