

Opening the Door on Isolation to See the Power of Love

By Liao Wei-Ching

As the hospital diagnosed its first COVID-19 case, 70 colleagues needed to be quarantined immediately, and the hospital activated a response team, with the Occupational Health and Safety Office managing the testing schedule for the quarantined staff. Director Lin Shu-Ru mentioned, “At the time the CECC announced restriction on the overseas travel of healthcare workers, leading to objections. Before our colleagues were quarantined, they said, “They can’t leave the country, but we can’t even leave our room, there is nothing to complain about.” Clearly, the staff needing quarantine couldn’t help but be worried and stressed, with so many “what ifs” in their mind. No one wants to “get lucky” from caring for patients!”

“Hence, apart from organizing the quarantine rooms, we also had to focus on calming anxieties.” Director Lin Shu-Ru explained, during the quarantine period, to prevent family members from worrying, some colleagues would constantly change



The quarantine dormitories prepared for colleagues by Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital.

the angles or spots in their dormitory where they video called from, so that family members would not realize they were under quarantine. With nowhere to go, some colleagues began working out in their rooms, and couldn’t wait to show off their progress after quarantine was lifted. But some colleagues also expressed the pressure they experienced from not wanting neighbors to realize they were quarantining at home. “The healthcare

workers we had to quarantine were all very young, and 14 days was a long period of time for them, but they were all quite positive coming out of quarantine.” Director Shu-Ru also added, “Amongst these colleagues, the experience shared by Deputy Head Nurse Su Yu-Hsin left the biggest impression on me.”

The World Behind the Door

When SARS occurred, Su Yu-Hsin had just graduated junior high school. At the time her grandfather became sick, and she wanted to learn nursing skills and knowledge, so that in the future she could help alleviate suffering when anyone in the family was sick. Because of this, she applied for nursing school even against family wishes, and dedicated herself to the bedside after graduating. She said, “In the past I have been quarantined due to acquiring measles from a patient I was caring for. At the time, I assumed the patient role, and felt worried when watching colleagues being busy outside my room. So when I returned to my workplace after quarantine, I was always extra careful and attentive with the wearing of protective equipment.” This second quarantine was due to her supporting the intubation of the old man with breathing difficulties and worsening conditions. The old man was confirmed to be a COVID-19 case later,

and she had been in close contact with the him, so needed immediate isolation.

Even though she was worried about the unit being short on staff due



The hospital provided meals, delivered by the Humanities Office, for the quarantined colleagues.



to some of the staff being quarantined, Su Yu-Hsin still had to pack her belongings and begin the 14-day self-isolation. The biggest regret was not being able to attend the wedding of her relative who was close to her as a sister.

She mentioned that at the time on TV and mobile news outlets, the pandemic was being reported almost continuously for 24 hours a day, with confirmed cases steadily rising and deaths also occurring. All these happenings increased the fear in close friends and family, and her family even wanted her to quit her job due to the danger. Because of this, she continuously hid the fact that she was being quarantined.

“I could only tell them that the hospital had enough staff recently, so I was spending my days off resting at the dormitory.” Although speaking casually, a shapeless, heavy burden hides behind her easy words. Not able to leave her room, the only things left to do was the “unproductive life” of surfing the internet, watching tv shows, sleeping, and eating. Reading the hospital provided Jing Si Aphorisms, she worked hard to change her thoughts and outlook, so she would not be stuck in a negative mindset. “Eating” became my favorite hobby at the time, otherwise the nights spent in a restricted and foreign space was really very difficult...” Yu-Hsin felt like

she could suddenly understand what it felt like to be a patient in the intensive care unit, only able to lie in bed, with lights on for 24 hours, feeling helpless and frustrated at being trapped.

On the second or third day of quarantine, restlessness began to set in, and she could only keep telling herself, “Keep going! One less day now!” and keep encouraging other colleagues in the same situation through group chats. Counting the days, the quarantine end date finally arrived. After completing the 14-day quarantine, she stayed calm, and after resting for two days, returned to her workplace role. At that time, the ward had already been transformed into a dedicated ward for confirmed cases.

Feeling the Same Feeling, Sharing the Happiness

“After returning to work, the patients in the ward were all returned traveler cases. Seeing the young people studying overseas who had the rare opportunity of returning home but couldn’t reunite with family, I felt I could relate to them, because it was similar to how I was working away from home and couldn’t see my family due to being quarantined.” So, when encountering an emotional young woman, Yu-Hsin felt she could share her own experience. Yu-Hsin led by example to help the young woman



Upon returning to work after being quarantined, Associate Nurse Unit Manager Su Yu-Hsin found she could relate more to isolated patients, and had greater compassion in her care.

change her mindset and helped her see that after the short period of quarantine, she could return to doing what she wanted. Yu-Hsin also shared current fashion trends and joked with the young woman, so that she was no longer upset but cheerful.

Because she understood the frustration and tiresomeness of being quarantined, Yu-Hsin understood what patients wanted. “During quarantine, there were many foods I wanted to eat but couldn’t. However, we were very lucky, with the department managers and dietetics department creating personalized meals, allowing me to have the food I enjoyed and also the nutrition I needed. Every time I saw the picnic boxes thoughtfully organized by the hospital; I would be excited about the prospect of something new to try.” After receiving that joy, Yu-



Hsin learnt to bring snacks like ma lao, crackers, and Yakult, and give them to the patients at mealtimes. Seeing the surprised reactions from patients, Yu-Hsin felt very happy herself too.

She shared that, “Every situation has positive and negative sides, if you allow yourself to be trapped under the influence of the situation, it will be more and more depressing. I’m really grateful for the positive encouragements I received from everyone during this period. I think that if I care for patients like they are my family and help them leave the hospital with joy in their hearts, I can have a different experience from my work. If every patient is treated with compassion, they will naturally also give back positively.” In her journey, Su Yu-Hsin has always been described as positive and optimistic, and her passion for nursing has allowed her to persevere in her career despite being quarantined twice. She used her setbacks as motivation, and dedicated more love for her patients.