

Fighting the Good Fight with Love and Purpose

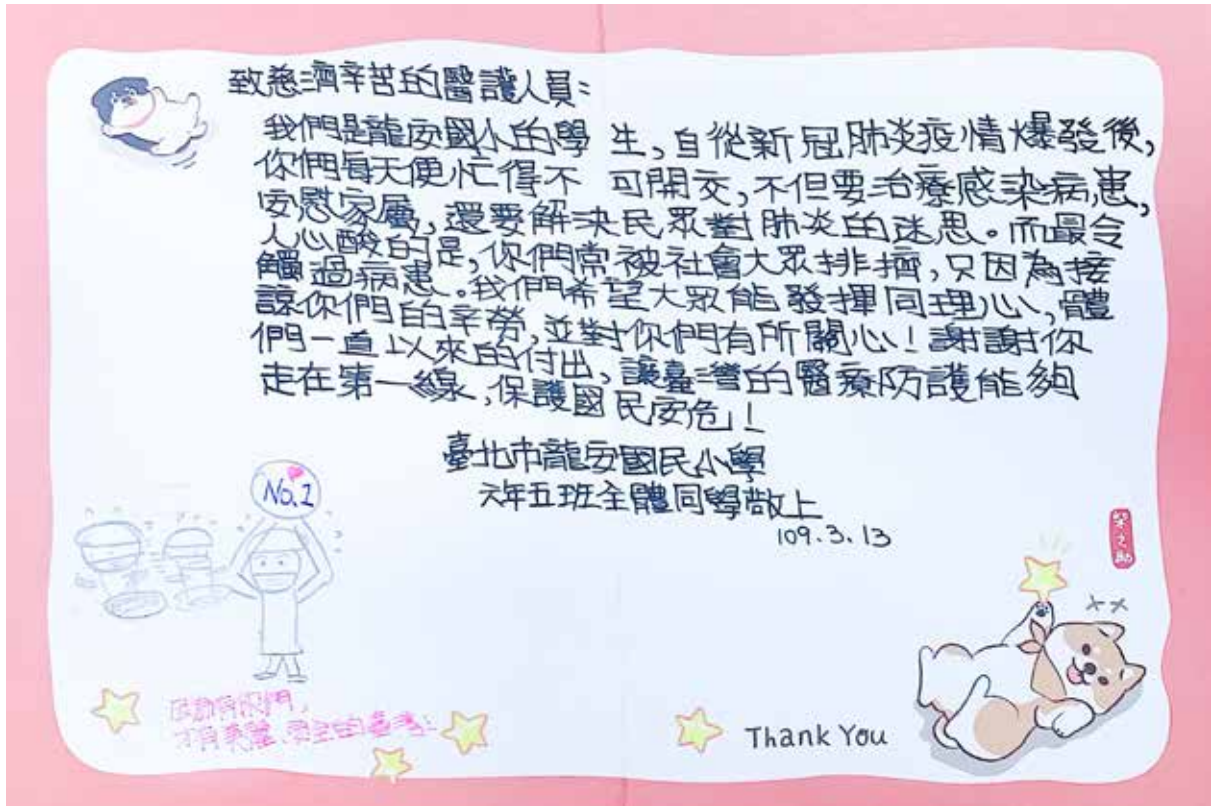
**Chao You-Chen,
Superintendent of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital**

I still recall the start of the SARS outbreak years ago in 2003. Outspread public panic occurred due to the unknown nature of the disease, high mortality rate, and limited treatment. Faced with the fear of infection and death, work and life for health professionals changed dramatically overnight, and some even refused to be involved in the care of critical patients. As the Director of Internal Medicine at the Tri-Service General Hospital at the time, the disciplined nature of the military hospital deterred health professionals from refusing duty of care. However, faced with such a significant epidemic, I recognized the utmost importance of protecting frontline colleagues and preventing transmission within the hospital. Therefore, at the start of January 2020, with the early signs of threat, Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital quickly began preparing resources for infection prevention, allowing our frontline colleagues to feel safe and focus on caring for their patients.

Faced with the outbreak of the new



coronavirus (COVID-19), apart from preparing sufficient resources, many other details also had to be managed and assessed. For instance, patient admission processes and working rosters were modified, staff were deployed to conduct infection testing at airports, and a dedicated team for COVID-19 care was established. For information on the disease to be widely available to limit uncertainty and panic, new collaboration occurred across different disciplines, and a response team was created. In this instance, infectious disease, respiratory



Elementary school students sent hand written cards & drawings to cheer up medical professionals. 2020 year end.

medicine, emergency medicine, and the infection control center played crucial roles. The nursing department, intensive care unit, as well as the specifically established dedicated unit each had their own important responsibilities. The general affairs office was in charge of resource allocation, the engineering affairs office supervised the formation and operational logistics of infection screening stations, the public communications

office assisted in gauging public opinion and updating announcements, the deputy superintendents managed staff deployment and communications with government health departments, and the Humanities Office and Head Secretary encouraged morale in colleagues and supported the daily needs of quarantining colleagues. All staff at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital performed their individual duties, convened daily to collate information



The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic happened again in May 2021. Photo depicts Supt. Chao You-Chen presents his gratitude to volunteers for setting up the outdoor screening station within two days on May 15, 2021.

and opinions from inside and outside the hospital, and organized job priorities and allocations for the following day.

Through each meeting, various infection control measures were progressively instated, for instance, hospital admission control, temperature checks on entry, questionnaires on respiratory symptoms and travel, occupation, contact and cluster history, tutorials on donning and doffing of personal protective equipment, and the audit and regulation of overseas travel in health professionals. After the identification of the first patient case in the hospital, investigation found that the number of colleagues in contact with the case totaled to 138 individuals, 70 of which had to immediately cease work and be quarantined. Consequently, details such as individual housing, food, and support for packing basic essentials as well as reassurance for their family members had to be quickly organized for by the response team.

When Taiwan only had a total of 31 cases, 5 of them were being cared for at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital. Over time, more patients were admitted, including those returning from overseas, those from testing centers, or those developing symptoms when quarantining at home. As the superintendent, I have to balance my responsibility of providing satisfactory

care in patients, preventing the possibility of any cluster transmissions to protect the whole hospital (the anxiety and uncertainty I experienced whenever a colleague developed respiratory symptoms or a fever is truly difficult to put in writing), and ensuring sufficient resources and personnel to sustain ongoing admissions. Through the cooperation of all colleagues, I am grateful that operations have been positive and successful.

To be efficient and disciplined in accomplishing tasks in a very short period of time is truly not easy, and I express gratitude once more for every colleague's sense of mission and interdisciplinary teamwork which helped us reach our goals. In particular, the dedication of Director Su Wen-Lin is memorable – he was the first to volunteer to conduct screening at the airport, he actively collaborated with Tzu Chi University to develop a ten-minute rapid testing technology, and also recently published literature on his experience caring for patients. Director Lin Chih-Pei led the testing team and improved on technology, increasing the PCR test standards to be nationally certified, and processing test samples from outside the hospital as well. In addition, infectious disease specialist Hong Bo-Bin, intensive care unit director Wu Yao-Kuang, emergency department director Yiang Giou-Teng, infection control

center deputy director Wu Bing-Sheng, and respiratory medicine director Lan Chou-Chin have all greatly contributed to our success at combating the pandemic.

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, tested not just our ability to adapt and work together, but also highlights what the Dharma Master Cheng Yen refers to as “the Grand Lessons from COVID-19” for us to self-reflect and contemplate on reducing our materialism and unnecessary consumption. Therefore, I also incorporated the Dharma Master’s health promotion strategy – a vegetarian lifestyle and thankful praying, into our pandemic response. The hospital promoted vegetarianism, provided vegetarian meals and meal vouchers, allowing colleagues, overseas workers, and local caregivers to enjoy the delicacy of vegetarian food. We initiated our pandemic response by purifying our own mind and soul, reducing the killing of animals, and loving and protecting our environment and Earth. Through the work of Tzu Chi people, we also invited the Minister of Health and Welfare Chen Shih-Chung, New Taipei City Mayor Hou You-Yi, and officials from Centers for Disease Control to participate.

There are a multitude of people to thank for our safe navigation through the past months of pandemic response. All the Tzu Chi volunteers, helping construct

six-star disease screening stations, making cloth masks and vegetarian meals, providing various personal protective equipment such as safety goggles, alcohol sanitizer etc., signaling their support and appreciation for us. More importantly, gratitude is to be expressed to our Master, who gave me great strength at the start of the pandemic, when saying “Superintendent, you must be attentive but not anxious, everything will be safe and sound!” This is the blessing from the Master, which alleviated my worries and unease; and so, I share it with you all too. So long as we follow the Master’s guidance to be devout in practicing vegetarianism, to be attentive but not anxious, to care for and empathize with others, to all work hard together according to our hospital plans, we can definitely pass through this challenge.

Looking back, by chance perhaps, the Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital’s 10-year anniversary coincided with the major earthquake in Nepal in 2015. As groups and groups of Tzu Chi health professionals and volunteers headed to Nepal to provide disaster relief, and on returning encountered the New Taipei Water Park Fire, the 10-year anniversary memories are filled with images of disaster relief and medical aid. This year’s COVID-19 pandemic coincides with the 15-year anniversary of Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital



On May 18, 2021, Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital nearly 50 doctors of internal & external medicine learning the standard sampling procedure for preparation of the on-going enormous needs of testing.

(2020), as if reminding us that Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital is a hospital with a mission, with periodic warnings cautioning us to hold gratitude during times of peace, and to always remember our mission to “Relieve Suffering Across the Globe”. Whether it be a century or a millennium,

our hospital will stand strong as a rock, symbolizing the safeguarding of life, health, and love. Over the generations, as the baton is passed on, health professionals will continue the mission of serving with love and purpose, as we together implore for a better world for all.