

# Encounter with a Patient from Another Country



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When cochlear implant was introduced to Taiwan, it was only single band cochlear. Now, it has been developed to multiple bands to transform sound. It is like a big jump from cassette player to surrounding sound stereo. It is great news to patients.

It is one of most painful things of life if one loses hearing. The cochlear implant technology gives the severe hearing impaired patients hope. It is what I have been doing. In fact, many children who have had cochlear implants, their grades are not less than the other children. They live a normal and happy live. The elderly no longer have to stay in a corner and now can live a colorful live.

“Foreign Country” (author Kebao Deng) is a famous war literature I read when I was in elementary school. It describes the main character in Burma Expedition who withdrew from Yunnan to Myanmar, and finally stayed in Northern Thailand. I was very impressed and had a lot of respect for him. In 2014, I actually met the offspring of the main character in “Foreign Country”.

Little An is the third generation, and is the younger one of a prematurely born twins. Both of them have many complications due to premature birth, such as issues with the heart, hearing, lung, bronchus, etc. At the time, the family did not have health insurance, and it was hard to take care of these two children. Having difficulty in money, the parents still worked hard to fight for the children’s right to survive.

## **Taking Over Difficult Case - He Can Hear and Talk Now**

Although Little An was three, he still could not hear. After an unsuccessful cochlear implant, Little An was transferred to Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital. I took over the case.

To me, a transfer from a hospital well-known for cochlear implant shows the confidence of our abilities. More so, I wanted to help this child. Not only because he is the offspring of “Foreign Country” and



**Dr. Wu Hung-Pin executes the cochlear implants. No matter how difficult it was, he worked hard to complete the task.**

the parents love this child, but because I am a doctor, I hope to help him to hear like other children.

There were a lot of issues when we operate for the first time because Little An's facial nerves covered the cochlear. We were not able to find room to insert the electronic ear unless we cut off the facial nerves. However, if we did that, the face would be deformed. This is the reason previous operation was not successful.

Later, I tried various methods, even tried turning Little An's head to the other side for a backward implant. The final method was to cut a small crack at the end of the nerve, splitting it into two, and successfully inserted the electronic ear through the two facial nerves. It took over five hours for the operation, which was nearly double the time of a normal operation. The operation was successful, and Little An was able to hear. The recovery was good, too. He reacted to sound and sensitivity. Everyone was very happy for him.

### **Sudden Loss of Hearing Lead to Operation Again**

Unexpectedly, six months after the operation, resistance of the 12 electrodes inside the electronic ear increased. After nine months, there were only two electrodes operating. A multiple-band electronic ear needs to have at least eight functional electrodes. Having only two electrodes is like hearing from the early single band electronic ear, the sound effect was no longer good.

In the beginning, I thought it might be the electronic ear malfunctioning, or infection inside Little An's cochlea, or something else causing it. The only thing we could do at the time was to replace it with a new one. The previous electronic ear was sent back to the original manufacturer for testing and the test result did not show any problem.

The new electronic ear operation was also successful, and the 12 electrodes

were operating fine. However, after about four months later, the same situation occurred. The resistance of 12 electrodes gradually increased, and we did not know what happened. We thought if it was bacterial infection, the antibiotics should have worked. If it was inflammation, then steroid or anti-inflammatory drugs should have worked. No matter what medicine we used, nothing worked, and we could not find the causes.

Although Little An had heart and kidney diseases, he was still an active child. The parents were also sad about the result because they had heard Little An said mom and dad, but he couldn't any more. I thought that if the parents agreed, I would try to do the implant for the third time, and Tzu Chi Foundation and Yawen Foundation also agreed to subsidize the expense also. The father wished to try again, but the mother felt that the child had suffered enough and decided against it.

Little An was the first child that I had to do implant operation twice. I suspected that it was the implant itself but something to do with his illness. However, due to multiple congenital illnesses, I was not able to do any check up in the child's head.

### **Open the Wings of "Smile" The Joyful Angel Smooths the Hardship**

In early May of 2015, four years old Little An passed away in the Medical Center in Taipei. The parents cared for their



**Wu Hung-Pin helped Little An to set up the electronic ears so he could hear and talk. Regrettably, he lost the hearing again. Little An's father told Little An to give Dr. Wu Hung-Pin a kiss to thank him.**



**Dr. Wu was touched by the love of Little An's parents, and the fact they never gave up.**

children the best they could unconditionally. The result might not be what we wanted, but I am glad that I had the chance to help in the process. Sometimes, I wondered if there was anything else I could have done. After doing cochlear implant for so many years, I learned something from this case. The doctor is connected with the patient, helping the patient to navigate. I participated in part of their lives.

My heart aches for Little An. The child had a good soul. He was not afraid of doctors, never cried when getting the shot, put out his arm when we needed to draw blood as if this was something he was used to. These did not bother him. He was always smiling. His attitude toward the hardship in life was nothing to him.

Buddhism talks about cause and effect. The result may not be everyone wished, but he had a special name, like the famous director Ang Lee. The parents loved this child. He might not be handsome but the spirit shone through his eyes. One could not help but like him. Although he was so little, he faced the hardship but encountered with a smile. Although I was not with him when he was operated for a bypass, I believe that he still went through it with a smile. He treated these things like a game, and happily completed his part.

Although it was a short period of time, Little An had brought joy to others. He was not afraid of doctors. He always smiled and hugged every medical staff. Today, with so many medical disputes and arbitration, this patient and family gave us the greatest support to continue what we do.

Every child with electronic ear is special. They are different from others due to severe hearing impairment which causes various types of abnormal issues. Little An's case is the first time I saw this type of case, which I believe is rare in Taiwan. I checked many articles but could not find the right answer of what happened to him.

Little An lived in Chongli, Longtan.

Although I had never met with the brothers and sisters of Tzu Chi volunteers there, I am touched that they regularly visited his home. Even after the operation, volunteers continued visited and cared for them after they returned home. Furthermore, our medical team did not give up because the first cochlear implant was not successful. I am even surer that we have established a good cochlear implants operation team.

Although we might think that we have done our best, the answer or result does not seem to be perfect. Parents and others know that we did our best. I think we can do better with more work. There are still mysteries in medical treatments, sometimes with no answers. I am grateful that Little An gave me the chance to learn things I have never thought about. I will continue to work hard.



**Although Little An's short life was spent mostly in the hospital, he brought joy and good memories to people around him. The picture is Little An's parents accompany him in hearing recovery exercise.**