



# Pioneering Holistic Health Care in Dalin

**By Lin Ming-Nan, Vice Superintendent, Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital**



It is always meant to be comprehensive care for all patients in a hospital. In most cases, nurses are the pioneers in proving holistic care.

When I just joined Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, I had to be on night shift due to the lack of resident physicians. There was one chilling night when I received a call from a nurse in the hospital ward. She asked me to check on a patient for additional prescription. It was painful to get up from a warm bed in winter. I hurried to the ward. The night shift nurse explained that her patient might need more morphine for pain relief. Cancer patients in hospice care usually need pain medication, therefore, a prn order (Latin “pro re nata order” is a written practitioner’s order for a medication) is needed. When I examined this patient’s medical chart, there was already a prn order. So I asked the nurse if she gave the medicine to the patient. She answered, “I did. But I feel the dose needs to be adjusted.” She brought me to the side of the patient. The patient was at the terminal stage, cancer spread to his brain and bone. He was too sick to talk. So, we couldn’t ask him about his condition. He was unconscious. I was complaining in my mind, was she joking? How could I assess and adjust the dose of morphine while the patient was unconscious? The nurse told me although she had given him the medicine 30 minutes ago when she checked on him she found he was grimacing on his facial expression. Thus, she thought the dose needed to be adjusted. She was sorry to wake me up!

I felt ashamed at the time. My colleague nurse assessed discomfort by means of patient’s facial expression, the patient was grimacing, although he couldn’t talk, but the nurse was able to discern the message.



**Group picture  
of Dalin Tzu Chi  
Hospital Palliative  
care team.**

In the course of medical care team training, the focus should be on the care of patient. Besides physical suffering, mental stress, family responsibility and readjusting are some aspects of needed attention. These require a team effort. It is inescapable that physicians are focusing more on physical problems but neglecting a patient's needs in other areas. Moreover, they may even overlook some details when assessing a patient's prognosis. However, our nursing team is treating patients with a whole person approach. I often find nurses in their continuing education adopting the humanoid diagram posters to be person-centered.

These lively human feature pictures are used to describe a patient's sickness, and show the patient's concept about health, family relationship and the impact of the diseases. It even includes what the patient needs to adjust to homecare after discharging from the hospital: community resource introduction, and improvement in the home environment. It is an all-rounded care. The unclear concept of holistic care is presented in concise and easy to understand format that includes all physical, mental, social or even spiritual needs. We can find the solutions for the patient's problems on the poster which is full of detailed information that carefully collected by the nursing staff.

The purpose of a medical care team is to take good care of all the needs of the patient. We need not only physicians, nurses, medical skills, pharmacists and social workers, but also volunteers. We rely tremendously on our nursing staff. We should be the pioneers of holistic health care. Let us work hard to alleviate the suffering of patients and their families!