

Special Report

Easing

Laotians' Suffering after Flooding

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July 2018, a Dam located in southeastern region in Attapeu Province of Laos broke causing hundreds of deaths and more than ten thousand people homeless. Tzu Chi volunteers from Taiwan and Thailand collaborated in a disaster relief effort. After coordination through many avenues, volunteers finally were able to hand out Tzu Chi blankets and foldable beds to victims in the disaster areas on September 2nd.



In March of 2019, Tzu Chi Charitable Foundation donated one hundred and ten medical beds to the Champasak Province Hospital in Lao. They also reached an agreement with local government on how to help with the disaster relief effort. From August 17 through August 20, the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) held the first free clinic in Laos. Medical staff consisted of one hundred and fourteen volunteers from nine countries, including Taiwan,

Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong, France, Indonesia, Canada and Laos. They held free clinics at the local Paksong Hospital, Champasak Province Hospital and Attapeu Provincial Hospital. Clinic services included internal medicine, surgery, Chinese medicine, dentistry and optometry, etc. They served a total of 3,105 man-times and donated an additional 110 hospital beds and two-hundred and twenty IV stands to the Champasak Province Hospital.



Tzu Chi International Medical Association organizes a free clinic event in Laos for the first time. August 16, 2019, first team arrives to setup the site at Paksong County Hospital. Dr. Eugene Tang from Singapore (first left) leads the team in setting up the site.

Early Opening of Dentistry Department; Optometry Ready to Perform Surgery

Singapore was first to dispatch 34 volunteers who later met up with volunteers from Taiwan and Hong Kong on August 15 in Ubon before taking a bus ride to Chong Mek. It was already seven-thirty at night after they cleared custom and checked into a local hotel in Paksong. They had traveled over two thousand and eighty-seven meters and over fifteen hours.

To communicate more effectively with local patients, Singapore Tzu Chi volunteers Dr. Eugene Tang and dental assistant Ms. Jennifer Ee created different pictorial charts with translation and Khmer pronunciation. On the way to the disaster area, volunteers prepared themselves by memorizing the chart and making detailed notes.

On August 16, a group of volunteers were deployed to help prepare set up the site at the Paksong County Hospital. Volunteers from Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Thailand, worked together to do clean-up, set-up and the moving of medical equipment. Within a short period, everything was in order and the dentistry department was opened to register patients by two pm in the same afternoon, ahead of schedule.

Dr. Man Chi-Yin, the convener of TIMA Hong Kong, stated that it was a rare educational opportunity to be able to work side-by-side with pharmacists to help pack the medications. He also took to heart the way Dr. Young Liyin from Singapore, organized and coordinated every detail of the event all by herself.

On the same day, five Tzu Chi International Medical Association optometry volunteers from the Philippines arrived at Champasak Provincial Hospital. After inspecting the medical equipment, Dr. Antonio Say immediately started to operate on Wanna. Wanna endured inconveniences from his cataract for more than fifteen years. He was happy



After the cleft lip surgery, the woman is grateful and shows her gratitude by kneeling to the medical staff. Behind is Dr. Fong Poh Him, Dr. Zhang Shengming.



Dr. Yeh Tian-Hao and the surgery team working to fix the little girl's clef lip. The mother holding the girl's hand, full of hope.

to be treated. After operation, volunteers transported him to a hotel and a follow-up appointment the next day.

With earnest and pious love for Laos, 16 TIMA Taiwan members left Taiwan on August 15 and travelled nearly 1,926 meters to meet up with other volunteers at the Paksong Hotel on the night of the 16th!

Paksong Hospital Saves Lives; Finding Cures for the Critically Ill

It started to rain in the morning of August 17. The wet and damp grass in front of the Paksong Hospital did not deter

the arrival of local residents. The crowd continued to gather and grow inside the temporary tents setup outside of the hospital entrance awaiting registration.

Health Department Director Dr. Sonkiat, Deputy Director Dr. Vannasay and Associate Dean of the Champasak Provincial Hospital, Kongmany Panayasavath, were on-site at the free clinic to provide support. Deputy Director Dr. Vannasay, who sponsored this free clinic event said, "This event was well organized, professional and complete with all the necessary medical supplies. I am very appreciative of the medical services Tzu Chi offers to Laotians."

Health Department Director Dr. Sonkiat also expressed his gratitude towards Tzu Chi's aid and collaboration. From medical staff to equipment and supplies, Tzu Chi bridged the resource gap at the Hospital. He hoped that the free clinic event could also be held at other regions where medical support was also greatly needed.

Surgical team discovered that a female patient, Pean Sengkhamhen, had nasopharyngeal cancer that spread to her bones. She had surgery at a local hospital three months ago but since then the tumor near corner of her left eye started to enlarge. After consulting with a few doctors, the Tzu Chi Foundation Deputy executive Officer David Liu asked Deputy Health Director Vannasay to transfer the

patient to a large hospital to begin nuclear medicine scan and MRI examine to see if they could bring the results back to Taiwan for further evaluation of potential treatment opportunity.

Magical Surgery Fixed Cleft Palate; Mother Kneeled to Show Appreciation

Eight-year old Nhoo Lum was born with a cleft palate. The right lip was unable to cover her canine tooth. She refused to go to school for fear of being bullied because of her appearance. Her mother is raising a total of thirteen children so there is no extra money to pay for her operation. At the free clinical event, the



Originally setup in the hallway, dental team moves their treatment area indoors due to the rain. Within the little room, dentists provide service to patients.



Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital Traditional Chinese Medicine Dr. Ou Tsung-Yi (left) applies acupuncture to treat Mr. Hen's vision which also resolve his issue of not able to stand after squatting.

Thailand Chinese Medicine father-daughter partner and first time volunteers, Pratap Taptanat and Hatatitip Taptanat, help relieve the pain of Laotians.



surgeon spent about half an hour to perform the operation to close her lip. The mother was overwhelmed with gratitude.

When resident Ms. Hong was two-year-old, a small nodule appeared on the right side of her mouth. She is now forty years-old and had surgery in 2018 at a local hospital to try to remove it but the operation resulted in restricted movement of her mouth. She no longer was able to fully close her mouth. She had suffered pain and inconvenience since but didn't return for follow-up even after the wound was infected. The Tzu Chi surgical team spent close to an hour to suture her mouth together. She was grateful that she kept kneeling to the medical staff before leaving the visit. Dr. Shenming Chang and his team decided to apply type Z-flap reconstruction for the operation. They planned to start additional surgery next year if they would get a chance.

Dr. Zhang Shengming (transliteration), originally born in Laos, moved to Taiwan when he was twelve years old and eventually became a doctor. He understood his hometown's need for medical support, so he returned to Laos at the age of fifty to help with emergency medical work.

In July of 2018, when the dam broke, Zhang came back to Laos three days after the disaster to organize emergency medical system aid. During this time, he met Tzu Chi volunteer Zhen Zhenghui (transliteration) and began his journey with Tzu Chi to help Laotian people. Zhang's main role in this medical clinic was to help translate but also served as back-up for other medical staff and he welcomed any opportunity to support surgeries as a learning opportunity. "The Tzu Chi Organization has brought warmth to his country. Today is only the beginning. I

hope in the near future, their love will expand and reach more people”.

Laos is a medically deprived country. There are many sick residents who couldn't be treated by doctors. A few goiter cases required fully equipped operating room and large medical fees. The treatment by the surgical team reduced such financial burden.

Treating Toothache; Acupuncture Eases Pain

Four volunteer dentists from Singapore hoped to bring patients peace and warmth during their service.

Sixty-year-old BoTien was head of the Ban Mei Saysomboun village. Although local residents had seen the announcement about the free clinic, they still had doubts about the event and could not believe that anyone would offer free medical treatment. BoTien, suffering from a toothache, travelled more than thirty meters from Ban Mei Saysomboun to be at the free clinic site early. Aside from getting his dental treatment, he also wanted to confirm if this foreign organization called Tzu Chi really did provide free medical help. Once he saw the set up, he quickly called his village folks and informed everyone the great news. BoTien lied on the dental chair comfortably awaiting Singapore dentist Dr. Samsudin Bin Jetty to treat him. BoTien ended up having two teeth removed



Sensing local's lack of knowledge regarding chronic diseases, Dr. Huang Chen-Sen starts to provide educational information after testing their blood sugar level.

and after picking up some antibiotics, he happily returned home.

There were two Chinese Medicine areas among the free clinic site. A total of five patient beds were set up. Three of the five beds were assembled out of six Tzu Chi's foldable Fuhui beds. Chinese medical treatment was supported by a total of nine doctors from Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong.

Using a walker, barely able to move, 66-year-old Pitnampo Phong suffered pain in her right leg, right knee and shoulder. She had tried many medical treatment and medication but did not see any improvement. Chinese medicine doctor Xie Yao-Lian from Taiwan used a combination of acupuncture and cupping therapy to relieve her pain. She was able to walk without much effort after the treatment.

Head of Beng Lieng Village, Mr. Hueng's eye sight improved after Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital Dr. Ou Tsung-Yi used acupuncture and laser acupuncture on his skull. Miraculously, his issue of standing up after kneeling was also fixed! He demonstrated how easily he was able to squat and stand repeatedly. He was so happy!

Eliminating Eye Diseases and Welcoming a Bright New World

Another free clinic was held at the optometry department in the Champasak Provincial Hospital. There were five ophthalmologists from the Philippines to

perform eye surgeries. After initial and follow-up screens in June and August, respectively, ten local residents were selected to receive operation on that day. Less than twenty minutes were spent on each patient for the cataract surgery to help them see a brighter world.

Seventy-three-year-old Dumkaew suffered from cataract for the past 2-3 years. Near or far, things were unclear and she was unable to do anything. After walking out of the operating room and able to see the large and small letter on the eye chart clearly, she said to the volunteers, "I feel like I am giving a second chance to live! I am so happy!"

Dr. Bounthanh Phaymany, team lead



On August 18, 2019, there is still long line on the second day of Paksong County Hospital free clinic event.

at the Champasak Provincial Hospital Optometrist Department, “This is our first time working with Tzu Chi in the free clinic. This is such a valuable experience. Most importantly, we were able to bring some normality back to those who suffer from vision loss.”

Translation team played a critical role in international free clinic events. They were the communication bridge between doctors and patients. With the invitation from volunteer Zhen Zhenghui, Pakse Oversea Chinese School Vice-Principal Ding Shiuching and forty other teachers accompanied their students to support translation. Consulate of Laos also invited many Chinese-Laos residents to help. Adding volunteers from Thailand and local residence, there were

more than forty people involved in the translation team.

Pratap Taptanat and Hataitip Taptanat are father-daughter Chinese Medicine partners from Thailand. It was their first time volunteering oversea with Tzu Chi. Paratap is second generation Chinese born in Thailand. He has a clinic in Thailand called “Zhan Clinic” providing free medical services for the underprivileged residence. He was introduced to Tzu Chi during the 2004 South Asia Tsunami. A year ago, he started to volunteer twice per month at a branch office in Thailand. His twenty-four-year-old daughter Hataitip was exposed to Chinese medicine from her dad since high school. She eventually went to Chinese Medicine University in Hubei, China to study Chinese medicine.



**Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital
Dr. Lu Yu-Chu provides
medical treatment in the
Chinese medicine area.**

About half-a-year ago, she returned to Thailand after graduation and started to treat patients with her father and volunteered at Tzu Chi. Pratap believed that if everyone would do good deed then the world would be a peaceful place. Hataitip felt that she had known everyone for a long time even though it was the first time she met the team. Her biggest reward was the chance to volunteer at the event to help ease the pain and suffering of many disadvantaged people.

Tzu Chi International Medical Associate members, consisted of volunteers from Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong and Singapore cooperated and provided medical services to the people of Laos.

Free Clinic; Increasing Internal Medicine Consultation Stations to Meet Demand

“Pressure is building as the waiting line gets longer!” Dr. Huang Chen-Sen from Douliu Tzu Chi Hospital proclaimed, when he noticed the long line outside the clinic window. He vowed to see everyone who was in line. At the August 18th free clinic, the three hundred waiting seats in the tent area were occupied within one hour of event opening. There were still about one-hundred-meter-long line outside of the waiting area.

After negotiation with the volunteering team, Dr. Fan Wen-Sheng from TIMA

Northern Taiwan Branch, decided to increase internal medicine consult stations from seven to nine in order to meet the huge demand. They even used the dental chair as consultation area. Empty chairs vacated temporarily by doctors going on break were used for triage. He personally saw many patients himself to expedite the process.

Nephrologist Huang Chen-Sen noticed that most locals would only see doctors when they were sick and take medication only when they were ill. That was evidence of a lack of knowledge regarding chronic diseases. People with diabetes and hypertension were taking medication on an as needed basis like a painkiller. They hang on to the medications and taken only when there were symptoms even though the actual blood pressure and blood sugar level had elevated. He felt that providing proper education medical information seemed more critical than the prescriptions they were handing out. It was more important to educate them about health and preventative practice in their lives. “It’s hard to predict how long the free medical event could continue; but we can change incorrect perception with education.”

Thoracic physician Dr. Chiu Kuo-Liang from Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital pointed out that 80% of the Laos population work in the agricultural industry. With the declining economy, the average monthly income for a person is only about USD

170 to 270. A visit to the doctor could cost up to five hundred Taiwan dollars. Due to the lack of medical resources, Laotians rarely go to the hospital. In one of the consultations, we met a forty-year-old patient with pale complexion and pale nails. Upon further examination, it was discovered that he drank at least ten glasses of beer every day. Blood work revealed that he was severely anemic with only half of the normal hemoglobin level. Due to financial hardship, he never saw a doctor. Chiu sighed, "Tzu Chi's free clinic event finally provided a chance for them to get medical treatment."

Professional Exchanges; Collaborate to Provide Medical Treatment

Four local physicians from Laos joined the internal medicine team. Laotian Dr. Papha said that they prescribed medication base on the patient's description, but TIMA doctors were more experienced in the diagnostic process and she was happy to learn from Taiwan Dr. Chiu Kuo-Liang and Hong Kong Dr. Tse Hei-Yee. She hoped that there would be future opportunities for her to travel to Taiwan to learn more. Another Laotian Dr. Padith also noted that she learned so much clinical diagnostics knowledge from Dr. Huang Chen-Sen for the past two days and hoped that she could become a good physician one day.

Centenarian Phon suffered from backache and body soreness for the past two months. She had seen many specialists in the hospital but the pain did not seem to get better. Her daughter brought her to the Chinese Medicine free clinic as a last resort. After a half-hour treatment, she was able to straighten her humpback quite a bit and her aches and her pain seemed to subside.

Free clinic pharmacy was setup in the X-ray room of the hospital next to the internal medicine consult area. It was serviced by Taiwan Pharmacists Chen Hong-Yan, Su Fang-Pei, Li Yiching and Singapore pharmacist Li Yiching. A total of eight volunteers, including local pharmacists and nurses were supporting the free clinic pharmacy, a big team for an oversea free clinic event.

The free clinic's medical supplies were procured locally. The prescription templates had been modified to include boxes to check off items that had been purchased. This template expedited the process of filling pharmacy prescriptions. With the cooperation from everyone in the volunteering team, patients were able to pick up their medications quickly. There was no traffic observed at the pharmacy line. Medication brought from Taiwan was also inventoried by Su Fang-Pei during downtime, "I hope our medical estimate was sufficient to support the need of this free clinic."



A strong pharmacy team at work explaining to patients how to take their medication.

Treating Illnesses and Calming Hearts; Increasing Consultation Stations to Reduce Wait Time

Filipino volunteers continued to provide optometry surgeries at the Champasak Provincial Hospital.

Attapeu Province Sanamxay Hospital nurse Phyuwet said, “Some people did not want to have the cataract surgery. They worried that it might turn out worse than before or even cause blindness. Some wanted to come but could not find others to accompany them.” There were many reasons affecting their willingness to see doctors. After hearing this, Tzu Chi

volunteers spent extra effort to explain that cataract surgery was safe and had very little side effects. Optometry team not only provided free operations but also provided free transportation and room and board to remove all potential roadblocks.

When nineteen-year-old Pouthakan was two, she noticed her blurry vision. After an eye examination, she was diagnosed with cataracts. With the encouragement of the Tzu Chi physicians and volunteers, she decided to go ahead with the operation. “I am very hopeful that I have the opportunity to see clearly. Whatever the outcome of the operation may bring, let’s give it a try!” With the experienced Filipino surgery team, the



From August 16 through 18, 2019, Filipino TIMA volunteer Dr. Antonio Say (second row, first right) leads the optometry team in providing surgery to ten patients in Laos Champasak Provincial Hospital. Photo taken after successful surgeries.

cataract operation lasted less than twenty minutes. She needed a few days to recover post operation before she could see. She proclaimed, “So excited! I will be able to see clearly soon!”

Volunteer Pong Chuyi who had been with Pouthakan since the beginning said, “She was so nervous. Her head was down and she didn’t say a word. Now she is able to joke around.” After her daughter’s operation, Pouthakan’s mother Janpeng was elated! She kept on telling the volunteers, “I have never seen any free clinic in my town. Because of the Tzu Chi’s free clinic, my daughter can receive a cataract operation.”

Free clinic was targeted to close by

noon. By one o’clock in the afternoon, there were still about two hundred people waiting in line. Therefore, the medical team decided that they would make sure to see everyone before the end of the day. There were 138 medical volunteers servicing a total of 820 man-times.

The assessment team started to travel to the next site on the afternoon of August 17. They arrived at the Attapeu Provincial Hospital early morning of August 18. Due to the raining season, moss was covering most of the ground at the site. Concerns about slipping hazard, they procured cleaning suppliers to cleanup the area. When the emergency department personnel saw what the Tzu

Chi volunteers were doing, they also volunteered to help. A promotional van was driving around town to spread the news about the free clinic to bring more people out for the event tomorrow.

Marching towards Attapeu; Timing is of Essence in Treatment.

When Tzu Chi International Medical Team arrived at the Attapeu County Hospital on August 19, it was a bright and hot day. The clinic was planned to open at eight in the morning but more than 100 people had already lined up outside the tent by 7:30 AM.

Tzu Chi Charity Organization arranged tour buses to transport patients from the Sanase dam disaster area 15 meters away to the free clinic.

Internal medicine was setup on the second-floor conference room. Prior to the free clinic, Dr. Misai from the hospital asked the volunteers, “If there is anything I can help?” Naturally, he joined the free clinic team. He discovered that a fifty-seven year-old lady suffering from high blood pressure. After ordering an echocardiogram, he recommended the patient be hospitalized as soon as possible for further treatment.

Dr. Jiaen Ho from Hong Kong carefully examine every patient. She saw nearly one hundred patients after the whole day. No detail was missed. She believed follow-up on medication use was equally important

after the free clinic visit.

The surgery team was setup in the Operating ward on the second floor of the Attapeu County Hospital. The surgery team consisted of thirteen surgeons from Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and Laos.

Operating room nurse Chen Kuiling was born in Taiwan and graduated from nursing school. She and her husband Zhang Shenming were first time volunteering overseas. She sensed that the surgery team had a common belief that “We work as a team to help the patient”. There was no racial, religion and border divide. Patient’s comfort was the priority. “Do the best I could and as much as I could”. Since moving to Laos in 2006, she and her husband had done all



In the surgical clinic area, the gynecologist Dr. Hong Mun-Kun of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital operating a surgery.

they could in medical outreach to provide help to the underprivileged villagers. Through this free clinic event, they started to strategize that their next outreach effort could start with a health examine screening step followed by a more centralized medical treatment to reduce the cost of transportation for the patients.

It was also Nurse Tam Mei-Wah's first overseas volunteer opportunity. "Fast!" was the keyword she picked up after three

days working at the operating room. With each case, the medical team was fighting with time in order to treat and service more people. Having lived in a more affluent Hong Kong community, contrasting with the resource-lacking Laos, she now truly experiences the importance of "gratitude".

Translation volunteer Chen Biling was Laotian Tzu Chi volunteer Zhen Zhenghui's youngest daughter. She was deeply touched after witnessing how the Laotian

On August 20, Taiwan Tzu Chi Foundation Deputy Executive Officer David Liu donated 110 medical beds to the Champasak County Hospital. TIMA members & Tzu Chi volunteers are present to witness and celebrate the event.



citizens suffered toothache until it was unbearable all because the lack of dental hygiene. By the time they sought a dentist, it was usually too late to save their teeth and required extractions. She empathized every time she saw the patient needed to have their teeth removed. She felt their pain and wanted to do more, to educate those poor people about dental hygiene and preventative dental care.

In the afternoon, Hospital and local officers visited the free clinic site to present certificate of appreciation to Tzu Chi. There were still about two to three hundred people waiting in the tent. The tour bus made a total of six round trips within 15 kilometers radius of the disaster area to transport residents to and from the free clinic. In order to accommodate and treat more patients, the free clinic hour was extended from five to six o'clock in the evening before wrapping up.

Due to the urgent need, the original planned event of a three-day free clinic for two thousand participants was increased to 3,105 man-times; 155% over estimate of the original target. Deputy Executive Officer David Liu said that in the first ever three-day Tzu Chi free clinic from Paksong to Pakse, extending to the disaster region of Attapeu, they saw a huge demand for medical aid, with a few severe cases. During this process, their biggest reward was the chance to inspire local Chinese volunteers through the free clinic event to promote the spirit of Tzu Chi, to introduce

them to become local volunteers and awaken a group of new Tzu Chi movement in Laos to continue the Tzu Chi Mission.

Donating Medical Bed; Vowing to Continue Passion of Volunteering

In the morning of August 20, TIMA team visited Champasak Province government for the medical bed donation ceremony. Deputy Executive Officer David Liu explained that after the dam broke on August 2018, Tzu Chi had initiated a series of disaster relief aids. When they found out about the lack of hospital beds, Dharma Master Cheng Yen donated 110 hospital beds to the Champasak Provincial Hospital. The recent dengue fever outbreak created high demand for hospital beds and many patients had to sleep in the hallways of the hospital during recovery. Dharam Master Cheng Yen donated additional 110 hospital beds, basically replaced all the beds in the Champasak Provincial Hospital, including IV stands and portable dinning tables to temporarily relieve the bed shortage at the hospital.

Champasak Provincial Hospital Dean Dr. Kham Sing stated that the donation by Tzu Chi improved the medical supply quality at the hospital and also helped reduced hospital expenses while providing uncompromised medical services to patients. Deputy governor of Champasak

Total Number of Patients Treated at the 2019 Tzu Chi Free Clinic Event at Laos

Date/Location	Surgery	Traditional Chinese Medicine	Internal Medicine	Dentistry	Optometry	Total man-times Serviced
2019.08.17 Paksong County Hospital	20	157	434	117	10 (operation)	740
2019.08.18 Paksong County Hospital	31	186	471	122	10 (post-op visits)	820
2019.08.19 Attapeu Provincial Hospital	40	284	920	301		1,545
Grand Total	91	267	1,825	542	20	3,105

Province Mr. Bualin exclaimed that the effort from the Tzu Chi medical volunteers allowed patients to be treated. What a loving kind act! He hoped to collaborate with Tzu Chi to improve the healthcare system for Laos' residents.

The free clinic closing ceremony was filled with many moving moments. TIMA Team lead Dr. Yeh Tian-Hao who visited the site in April and screened patients in June, shared his memorable experience from the free clinic cases. One was a patient suspected of skin cancer. During operation, doctors discovered that the patient had fistula affecting the root of his tooth. After consulting with other dentists, they determined that his cheek tumor was the result of tooth infection from his cavity. Working together, Dr. Yeh, Dr. Tang and Dr. Hong Mun-Kun of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital remediated the issue. Another

case was a three-year-old child who was given 0.1cc of anesthesia before the operation but suddenly stopped crying, blood oxygen dropped from over 90 to 80s. He was quickly transferred to Internal medicine to be monitored by Dr. Fan Wen-Sheng. With the care and love from the medical team, the child finally woke up. Dr. Yeh was grateful that all volunteers worked as a team to complement each other in time of need.

Two young physicians from Singapore, Dr. Zhang Yuting and Dr. Chen Zhengfeng, shared their eye-opening experience, "The only way to reach our goals, with so many medical volunteers across multiple countries, was with team players and common team spirits." They loved to give and spread the compassion and mission of Dharma Master Cheng Yen to every corner of the world.