



Kuanshan

**Emergency Service of
Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital
— A Life-Saving Station**

By Chen Hui-Fang

Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital may be small in size, the role it plays is critical. It is the only hospital between Yuli Township and Taitung City, which is about 80 kilometers apart. Furthermore, the hospital is located in a tourist town that neighbors renowned tourist sites like

Kuanshan waterfront park, Chishang Mr. Brown Avenue, Taitung Luye Highland hot air balloon, and Tianlong Suspension Bridge. Medical service is relatively important to both the locals and tourists.

For this reason, from the first day of its opening, Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital has taken on the task of providing critical care in the Rift Valley, and has maintained 24-hour emergency services for the past twenty years. The population of Kuanshan region and its neighboring towns of Chihshang, Haiduan, Luye, and Yanping is small, so in average the number of patients admitted to ER on



The picture shows Dr. Poon Win-Him and the nursing team on duty in the emergency room saving a dying patient.



Thanks to the long-term support of Hualien and Taipei Tzu Hospitals in addressing the scheduling problem of the emergency room in Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital, the emergency services never stop. The picture shows Dr. Chen Huang-Pin of Hualien Tzu Hospitals Emergency Department.

daily basis is 30; and on weekends and holidays, the number increases slightly to about 45-50. In the case of long weekends, due to the influx of tourists, the number falls between 80 to 100.

24-hour Emergency Service Supported by Hualien and Taipei Tzu Chi

In order to set up a hospital in such a small township and even be able to sustain 24-hour emergency services, both staffing and costs are a heavy

burden. Scheduling for on-call physicians is the most challenging task because an emergency room cannot operate without a specialist who qualifies as an emergency physician.

For the emergency room to operate smoothly and to achieve the best efficiency with the least amount of staff, each physician is on duty for twenty-four hours at a time. In terms of weekly schedule, four doctors from Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital are responsible for three to four days, Dr. Huang Bo-Ming from Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital supports



If the patients are in a critical condition, after emergency treatment, they are transferred to a major hospital within the golden hour.

one to two days, and doctors from Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, including orthopedic surgeon Yao Ting-Kuo and Yeh Kuang-Ting, emergency physician Wu Ren-Chieh and Chen Huang-Pin, neurosurgeon Pan Yan-Hong, Hung Hsiang-Yi, and Chiou Tsrong-Laang, surgeon Chen Yen-Cheng, and pulmonologist Chen Po-Pin, rotates one to two days. Furthermore, on Saturdays, Sundays and national holidays, when more patients are expected, doctors are needed to be on backup duty, which is also the responsibility of the doctors at Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital, with one doctor on duty for eight hours a day

for two days. It is this kind of relay race approach that the tremendous task of the small town emergency service in protecting lives continues.

Providing Familial Care for Solitude Seniors

There is no three-shift system for the emergency physicians here; a single physician must see both medical and surgical patients from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. the following day. Even though the number of patients is small, they are mostly concentrated during the night shift from 4pm to 12am, albeit



there will be three to five patients on average during graveyard shift due to automobile accidents, respiratory failure, heart discomfort, stomach ache, cold and so on, and occasionally a few drunken, rowdy patients killing time.

Therefore, no matter what time

Doctors are on duty at Kuanshan emergency room for 24 hours a shift, so they must learn to nap whenever possible to avoid building up physical strain over time.



Dr. Huang Bo-Ming has been traveling to Kuanshan every week for four consecutive years to serve in the emergency room, during which he experiences the warmth of the town and learns to communicate with patients in a gentle manner.

it is, sleepy or not, as long as there are no patients, the physician should still find time to take a nap and learn to rest whenever possible.

Nephrologist Wu Sheng-Teng, who is also the director of the emergency room at Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital, said, “When you are on night duty, you’ll see people come in for all kinds of illnesses. Usually, you are very, very lucky if there are no patients for 4 hours consecutively.” At least they can catch up on their sleep a little.

Solitary seniors can be found mostly in the countryside, and it is not uncommon for them to look after each other. That is why emergency medical staff often have to juggle several jobs aside from their own, such as looking after the patients. Tzu Chi volunteer Chu Hsiu-Tzu shared, “One of the grandmas was hospitalized in the emergency room for observation, and Dr. Wu Sheng-Teng was on duty that day. He saw that she had no families around her, so he spent some time with her, and even poured her some water. The grandma was very touched.” Sometimes when a solitude senior needs to be referred to a major hospital, the nurse will help by calling the village head to contact the family members, or will help to refer the patient to a social worker to address the economic or physical needs by finding the proper resources.

A Lesson of Communication for a Metropolitan Doctor

“The major hospitals in the north have plenty of resources, for example the trauma team can be activated for patients with cerebral hemorrhage, and the (neurosurgeon) specialists will take over after they arrive; even now, the trauma team can be activated directly by dialing 119, so the emergency physician does not have to go into the emergency area,” Dr. Huang Bo-Ming, an emergency physician at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, shared, “In contrast, on emergency duty in Kuanshan, we don’t have a consultation, so we have to do the stitching ourselves and compare old medical records if we don’t understand the EKG. In Taipei, I didn’t have to deal with hospital transfer, but now I even need to know what equipment and medicine should be on the ambulance during transfer.”

When Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital had an emergency room scheduling problem, Dr. Yang Giou-Teng, the director of the emergency department at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, helped and found Dr. Huang Bo-Ming who was willing to commute to Kuanshan for support, so since September 2015, Dr. Huang has been providing support to the emergency room in Kuanshan for one to

two shifts per week. He usually travels to Kuanshan on Thursday evenings, works Friday and Sunday shifts until 8:00 a.m. on Monday, and then returns to Taipei. The time on the road is longer and the workload is heavier, but Dr. Huang says, “It’s nice to be here. Most of the patients here trust their doctors, and I have more time to spend with my family.”

It turns out that Dr. Huang schedule

in Taipei was working every other night, leaving him with limited time with his children in the evening, and working a 24-hour shift in Kuanshan, which is equal to the hours of a three-day-shift in Taipei, actually provide him with plenty of free time for his family. There is another interesting reason why Dr. Huang decided to leave home to work in Eastern Taiwan, “It is much simpler here,



The nursing staff of Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital is equipped with multi-disciplinary skills and can provide support in the emergency room when needed.



One of the duties of the nurses at Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital is to take shifts as transport nurses to escort transferred patients on the ambulance to other hospitals. In the picture, the emergency nurse and the transport nurse completes the transfer handover, and the transport nurse hop onto the ambulance to escort the patient.

because all I need to do is to handle the medical aspect of the issue and not the non-medical aspect.” It turns out that Dr. Huang has been having communication problems since he was a child.

“When I was a resident, I wasn’t trained to communicate,” Dr. Huang said jokingly, “I was more blunt and straightforward, but not anymore. I have improved a lot since.” Dr. Huang is in fact considerate of his patients, the problem is that he tends to raise his voice when expressing his consideration. Take a drunken patient for example, he tends to criticize them non-stop, “I told you not to drink all the time and now see what happened.” Now he can slow his speech and soften his tone, and stop angering his patients.

Since he switched his place of work from Xindian to Kuanshan, which is 290 km apart, Dr. Huang Bo-Ming has been commuting weekly by train for the last four years. Before he knows it, he has already grown accustomed to the work environment and pace of Kuanshan, Taitung.

Backup Units on Standby for Patient Transfer

The guardians watching over the town in the quiet hours of the night, aside from the doctors, two nurses and security guards on duty in the emergency

room, include the medical examiners, radiologists, pharmacists, the cashiers; the ambulance drivers and transport nurses who are not usually present in the hospital are also on standby.

Due to the lack of specialist doctors, many patients cannot be admitted to Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital. For example, patients with myocardial infarction, gastrointestinal bleeding, drug poisoning and other critical conditions must be transferred to other hospitals for further treatment. When a patient needs to be transferred, the ambulance driver and the transport nurse must be ready to depart either to Hualien or Taitung, with the goal of delivering the patient safely to the destination in the shortest amount of time.

Because of limited resources, the emergency room of this little town must transfer most of its patients to a major hospital for proper medical care. However, providing timely medical care in a life-threatening situation has earned the emergency room the gratitude and appreciation of its patients and their families. Even though the staff and cost pressures are reflected in the monthly loss statements, Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital still holds on to its belief in watching over the underprivileged and strives to be a strong support for the people of the rural community.