

Put Our Right to Life to Good Use

**Chang Chih-Fang,
Superintendent, Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital**

I came from Hong Kong to study in Taiwan in 1982, and was admitted to the medical school of National Taiwan University (NTU) in 1984. Tzu Chi Hospital inaugurated in August 1986, when I was a junior in college. At that time, National Taiwan University Hospital (NTUH) established a cooperative education with Hualien Tzu-Chi Hospital, so after graduating from medical school in 1991, I chose to receive my residency training in Hualien until I became an attending physician. I was able to witness how Tzu Chi Hospital overcame adversity and stabilized operation in its first decade.

I chose to come to Tzu Chi with the simple reason that the hospital did not require a deposit and was remote. "Okay, I'll go," I said. At that time, traveling to Hualien was inconvenient for people living in Taipei. It was too long by train, or else one would have to take an unnerving flight. But it was a hospital that abolished security deposit system, with physicians who reject gifts and money from patients



and focus solely on their duty, I think it was good, and it fitted my philosophy. It was as simple as that.

After four years of residency training and two years as an attending physician in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, I finally decided to leave Hualien in 1997 to start my own practice and opened an Obstetrics and Gynecology clinic in Yilan. I was shocked by the 921 earthquake in 1999, which killed more than 2,000 people overnight.

This awakening of the unpredictability and fragility of life had helped me to redirect my life. I heard about a vacancy of obstetrician-gynecologist in Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital in 2003. I went to learn more about the place, but then I discovered that the population of Kuanshan Township was low, hence its birth rate must be low as well, and hiring a full-time obstetrician-gynecologist would not be cost effective for the small hospital. However, Wang Ji-Hung, the superintendent then, “Cost effective or not, the need is still there.” That was when I decided in my heart that I wanted to come. On February 1, 2004, I officially reported to Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital.

The small hospital had limited staff, so I was prepared to fill in for others. Despite the small number of OB/GYN patients, I was able to operate seven OB/GYN clinics a week, three of which were evening clinics so that patients could come after work. On Saturdays, Sundays and during the New Year, I would be on back-up duty in the emergency department, and I would be on duty in the emergency department on Sundays, which allowed me to be flexible in letting OB/GYN patients visit, thus optimizing our capacity and efficiency. My other main business was to participate in the South Cross-Island IDS medical outreach, which started since 2009, visiting patients in the mountains.

We used to travel into the mountains on Fridays and Saturdays, and now it is regularly Tuesday. After so many years of visiting patients in the mountains, the number of patients remains small. Unlike urban clinics, the number of patients here does not increase because of the accumulated reputation, because the elderly population in the mountain tribes is slowly aging or dwindling, and the young ones have long gone out to work for money. The small ones would inevitably relocate to other cities or counties. However, at least the tribes know about our schedule, and the medical bus would



drive around the village to broadcast the opening hours of the free clinic, reminding people to come. Those who has a cold or are not feeling well would at least have a doctor available who can prescribe medicine for them, so they do not have to debate on whether to travel to Kuanshan, which is 30 to 40 kilometers away, to seek medical attention.

In August of 2018, I took over the role of superintendent from Dr. Poon Win-Him and undertook the burden of leading the hospital. I am grateful to Dr. Poon for making Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital a great warm family.



Four Key Points of Development

Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital, as it enters into its 21st year, now focuses on four key points of development: 1) providing outpatient services in all specialties; 2) providing 24-hour emergency services; 3) providing specialized treatment and clinical instruction in Traditional Chinese Medicine; and 4) establishing a complete ABC Long-Term Care (LTC) Network in the Greater Kuanshan Region.

1. Providing Outpatient Services in All Specialties

According to the Taitung County Census in November 2019, Kuanshan Township and the surrounding Haiduan, Chihshang, Luye, and Yanping Townships have a population of 32,160 people, but the actual number of people living in Kuanshan should be even smaller. Even though Kuanshan and neighboring Chihshang are popular tourist destinations, there is still an out-migration of adults and adolescents from the area, leaving mostly children and elderlies behind.

Although Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospitals is only a regional hospital, it has to take care of people young and old, so the outpatient departments have to think

of ways to cover everything from head to toe, inside and outside. Take the number of weekly consultation sessions for example, the resident physicians at Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital provide a total of 50 consultation sessions, including obstetrics and gynecology, orthopedics, nephrology, rheumatology and immunology, rehabilitation, and Traditional Chinese medicine, while Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital supports a total of 32 consultation sessions in 16 specialties. General speaking, Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital provides outpatient services in 19 specialties and 82 consultation sessions on weekly basis. On behalf of the residents of Kuanshan, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the doctors who have long supported our outpatient clinics over the years.

2. 24/7 Emergency Services

Because Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital is located at the southern end of the Hualien Rift Valley, it is a key location for sending critical care patients to the south or north, so emergency care is indispensable. Our emergency clinic never closed a single day since inauguration.

The emergency clinic at Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital, located on the Taiwan Highway No. 9, does not have the staffing, resources, and equipment to directly



treat major trauma patients. Fortunately, we do not usually have that many major trauma patients, but we have activated the mass casualty emergency response to treat more than a dozen patients. Our emergency clinic is positioned to deal with acute problems, to provide early diagnosis and early treatment; and as for major trauma patients, the focus is on buying time to save lives.

If the patient comes to the emergency clinic with medical problems, early diagnosis and early treatment can be provided and if necessary, referral can be arranged. For OHCA (Out-of-hospital cardiac



arrest) patients, the prognosis of survival to transfer may be poor. If the patient has a sudden onset of a major illness, or is involved in an accident, the priority is to address the critical condition and stabilize the patient's vitals, and then transfer south to Taitung 40 km away or north to Hualien 130 km away. Although it would take a 30 min or 90 min drive,

I am grateful for our hard-working emergency care providers. A doctor must be on duty 24-hours, with all nurses be on standby to transfer patients. We have plenty of nurses

who are experienced cruising on ambulances on Taiwan Highway No. 9, racing against time, sustaining patients' vitals while struggling with motion sickness. With such a group of healthcare workers who respect life, we are able to keep watch over patients' lives every day in the emergency clinic.

3. Chinese Medicine and Clinical Teaching

Since Dr. Shen Yi-Ying joined the Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital, the

Department of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has built up a reputation in the greater Kuanshan region, where people know that they can find a TCM practitioner to address their problems. That is also why the sessions of Dir. Shen is always fully booked. Dir. Shen was a reputable physician in a metropolitan hospital in western Taiwan, and it is admirable of him to be willing to devote himself to rural healthcare, and even to incorporate humanism that is integral in healthcare in his teachings.

The TCM department of Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital provides education, research, and service. We hope that

under the leadership of Dr. Shen, we can train more TCM practitioners who are willing to stay and serve in the rural areas, and we further hope that all doctors in our TCM team will be willing to take root in Kuanshan.

4. ABC Long-Term Care in Rift Valley

The LTC (long-term care) team of Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital has grown from one person to more than 30 people, and is expected to complete the 17 services of the LTC 2.0 by 2020. The team is also promote local aging, in which includes mobile medical care, home nursing, auxiliary aids rental, home rehabilitation, home services, home respite, home hospice and home medical care, etc.; and community-based LTC organizations are also gradually been set up, such as the multi-service care center in Chihshang, and the implementation of group homes. The range of services provided by the LTC team of Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital are all-embracing. They regard the elderly as their own relatives, and all of their services are designed to help the elderly in revitalizing and delaying aging, as well as in relieving the stress of family caregivers and improve their quality of life.



Contentment, Gratitude, Understanding, and Forgiveness

“We do not have ownership of our lives, only the right to use it” is the Jing-Si aphorism that benefitted me the most. I hang it in my clinic as a personal reminder. The four-ingredient soup of Tzu Chi, “contentment, gratitude, understanding, and forgiveness”, is something I often use to encourage the entire hospital staff. I see life as a six-sided dice, and we each see few sides of it from our own perspective and come to our own conclusions. Contentment, gratitude, understanding, and forgiveness can help us to see things from others’ perspective. This empathetic approach is effective in healthcare and in life, depending on how one make use of it.

The greatest challenge in taking on the role of hospital superintendent is the lack of staff, a problem we have been facing for the past 20 years in Kuanshan. The worst shortage in rural areas is talent shortage. There is really no shortage of doctors in Taiwan, just unevenly distributed, whether in Kuanshan or other rural areas. Therefore, we are thankful to Hualien Tzu-Chi Hospital for supporting us with doctors over the years. I hope that

some retired or semi-retired doctors will consider coming to Kuanshan making serving in the rural areas a new direction for the second half of their lives.

I would like to thank all the staff of Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital, no matter who came first or later, for their willingness to guard this land together. I will also miss Dr. Chiu Chao-Jong and Dr. Hsiao Ching-Feng who have passed away. Their contribution to the healthcare of Kuanshan is an example to all of us.

From the moment I decided to become an obstetrician-gynecologist, my time with my family was limited, and this was especially true when I came to Kuanshan. That is why I have nothing but gratitude to my family - my wife and my children. My children also accepted their father’s long absences, but I would definitely go on trips with them when I could.

My son Tzu-An passed away at Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital at the age of 18. In his final moments he received hospice care in Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital. We also have demands for hospice care in Kuanshan, however, we do not have the necessary professional staff. Hospice care is supposed to fall under family medicine, but since everyone in this hospital is



Dr. Chang Chih-Fang demonstrates the use of technology to examine people with digital hand-held diagnostic scopes at the "Health and Welfare Technology Integrated Care Activation" event at the Public Health Center of Haiduan Township, Taitung County, and the test results can be sent online to the hospital for diagnosis by a specialist.

overburdened with multiple roles, I decided to do it myself. That is why I have recently completed my hospice training and obtained my qualification. I hope that Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital can one day provide hospice care for terminally ill patients in the last leg of their journey.

The mission of Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital, like that of the Yuli Tzu Chi

Hospital, is to look after the remote areas, not profit-driven. Now in its 21st year, I would like to thank Master Cheng Yen and Tzu Chi Foundation for setting up Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospital. With the support of Tzu Chi volunteers all over the world, we will continue to protect life, health, and love, and make the best use of all our lives.