

Special
Report

1



Bringing Hope of Reconstruction to Spinal Cord Injury Patients



**Tzu Chi Medical Mission Spinal Cord
Injury Medical Reconstruction Center**

By You Shou-Hua & Tseng Ching-Fang



Group photo of members of the Tzu Chi Medical Mission Spinal Cord Injury Medical Reconstruction Center and patients who shared their stories; back row (from left to right): Dr. Tsai Sheng-Tsung, Director of the Department of Neurosurgery, Dr. Liang Chung-Chao, Director of the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, Dr. Chen Sheng-Fu, Director of the Pediatric Urology Division of the Department of Urology, Dr. Kuo Hann-Chorng, Vice CEO of Tzu Chi Medical Foundation, Dr. Lin Chin-Lon, CEO of Tzu Chi Medical Foundation, David Liu, Vice CEO of Tzu Chi Foundation, Mr. Lu Fang-Chuan, Director of Charity Mission Development, Dr. Wu Wen-Tian, Director of the Department of Orthopedics, Ms. Chung Hui-Chun, Director of the Department of Nursing, and Dr. Chen Hao-Wen, Attending Physician of the Department of Orthopedics



CEO Lin Chin-Lon points out that Master Cheng Yen founded the Tzu Chi Medical Mission to provide optimal care for patients and fill their lives with joy and happiness. Tzu Chi medical teams assume responsibility for all issues and difficulties patients face in their lives.

Tzu Chi has been providing care for spinal cord injury patients for more than five decades. Tzu Chi Medical Foundation established the Tzu Chi Medical Mission Spinal Cord Injury Medical Reconstruction Center on February 16, 2023 to solve medical issues faced by spinal cord injury patients by creating an integrated team spanning various medical disciplines with the support of the Designated Account for Spinal Cord Injury Medical Reconstruction established by Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation. This all-around “Team Taiwan” will provide optimal care for spinal cord injury patients all over Taiwan and assist them in regaining their physical health. The goal is to alleviate their pain, rebuild their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, and enhance their life quality.



Vice CEO Kuo Hann-Chorng states that, over the past three decades, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital has been providing professional care for such patients to protect their urinary tract health. The extensive experience accumulated by the reconstruction therapy and rehabilitation teams of the orthopedics and neurosurgery divisions has reached a level of maturity enabling the hospital to form a “Team Taiwan” also known as Tzu Chi Team.

Tzu Chi Medical Foundation initiated planning for the Tzu Chi Medical Mission Spinal Cord Injury Medical Reconstruction Center in 2022 to provide all-inclusive care for around 60,000 spinal cord injury patients in Taiwan. It is further planned to set up local centers in Hualien, Dalin, Taipei, and Taichung in eastern, southern, northern, and central Taiwan, respectively. The goal is to provide professional care in the four major dimensions of concern, reconstruction, rehabilitation, and care. In the future, spinal cord injury patients will receive medical subsidies and emergency aid via the Designated Account for Spinal Cord Injury Medical Reconstruction established by Buddhist



Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation. They will also be offered assistance in the application for vocational training and disability benefits and subsidies.

Tzu Chi Medical Foundation held an inauguration press conference for the Tzu Chi Medical Mission Spinal Cord Injury Medical Reconstruction Center on February 16.

Over Half a Century of Dedicated Care for Spinal Cord Injury Patients

Since the foundation of Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in 1966, numerous spinal cord injury patients and their family members have been listed as long-term care recipients eligible for financial subsidies. In 1967, Mr. Chang, a resident of Yongxing Village in Hualien County, was one of these beneficiaries. He sustained a spinal fracture resulting in paralysis due to an unfortunate fall from a fully loaded gravel truck in Fengbin Township when he was only 40. Consequently, his family of six suddenly lost their financial support. After this incident was reported to Tzu Chi by local residents, the Master personally visited this family accompanied by a delegation of volunteers to assess the need of financial need. Mr. Chang had four children. His eldest son, who was 17 at that time, and his wife had part-time jobs, but his youngest child was only 3.



Mr. Chu Chen-Fu, a spinal cord injury patient, expresses his profound gratitude to Dharma Master Cheng Yen for founding Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, which he specifically selected for emergency care treatment when he sustained his injury. Over the past three decades, he has formed very deep bonds with Vice CEO Kuo Hann-Chorng and Director Liang Chung-Chao. When he married his wife, a media worker, Director Liang served as their wedding witness.

The Master therefore decided to provide the family with long-term subsidies in form of two Chinese pecks of rice and a living subsidy of NT\$ 200 per month. The foundation also covered part of Mr. Chang's medical expenses arising from the accident.

During a visit to a spinal cord injury patient, the Master also personally witnessed how a rat nibbled the foot of a patient lying on the floor of a dimly lit thatched cottage. The Master was deeply distressed and moved with compassion at the sight of the patient seemingly oblivious to a ghastly bone-deep wound.

After the inauguration of Hualien Tzu Chi General Hospital in 1986, the Foundation made an all-out commitment to promoting medical reconstruction therapies for spinal cord injury patients. With a view to providing care for a rising number of such patients, the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation set up a Designated Account for Spinal Cord Injury Medical Reconstruction as instructed by the Master in 1991. The goal was to offer services to patients in the four dimensions of medical subsidies, emergency aid, vocational training, and disability benefits.

CEO Lin Chin-Lon points out that Master Cheng Yen founded Tzu Chi Foundation and the Tzu Chi Medical Mission 57 and 37 years ago to provide optimal care for patients and fill their lives with joy and happiness. Tzu Chi medical teams assume responsibility for all issues and difficulties patients face in their lives. Spinal cord injury patients tend to suffer from chronic issues such as lack of bladder control. Vice CEO Kuo Hann-Chorng has been touring Taiwan to care

for such patients for almost 30 years. Tzu Chi currently has eight hospitals in Taiwan which are capable of providing comprehensive care for spinal cord injury patients. An interdisciplinary team has been formed to offer holistic medical care and improve the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of patients. This



Ms. Lin Kuei-Tzu, an experienced patient from Taichung affectionately named Auntie Kuei by the care team, greatly contributed to the foundation of ROC Federation of the Spinal Cord Injured. She jokingly states that Dr. Kuo Hann-Chorng has been dragged into this by her. As a matter of fact, their mutually supportive partnership has been very beneficial for spinal cord injury patients.



Mr. Yang Ching-Jen, who was in charge of the design of the “Spine Manager APP” sincerely hopes that a rising number of patients will benefit from this information and communication platform. He is deeply thankful to Vice CEO Kuo Hann-Chorng. First right is case manager Wu Chih-Yun.

team, which is composed of physicians, nurses, medical technicians, social workers, and nutritionists, strives to fulfill Master Cheng Yen’s initial calling of “serving Buddhism and all sentient beings”.

Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital is the first hospital in Taiwan to meet the criteria of the Program for the Use of Bone

Marrow Mesenchymal Stem Cells for the Treatment of Spinal Cord Injuries. Dr. Lin Shinn-Zong, Superintendent of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, shared the story of a patient surnamed Chien who had been paralyzed from the chest down due to a spinal cord injury sustained in a car accident. He had no feeling or pain below the chest and had to rely on self-catheterization to empty his bladder. After undergoing cell therapy and combined Chinese and Western medicine rehabilitation, he was able to stand up and walk with the help of a mobility aid. His urinary system is also improving. The Department of Neurosurgery has adopted Spinal Cord Stimulation (SCS) technology and the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine utilizes the latest technology and equipment to help patients regain their ability to stand up.

Tzu Chi Medical Mission Spinal Cord Injury Medical Reconstruction Center Provides Optimal Care for Spinal Cord Injury Patients All Over Taiwan

The center was established for the purpose of making the lives of spinal cord injury patients more convenient in addition to improving their physiological functions and decreasing the incidence of complications. The ultimate goal is to rebuild the mental well-being of patients and offer them more economic, social,

and spiritual support. Dr. Kuo Hann-Chorng points out that care for spinal cord injury patients has been weighing heavy on the Master's mind since the inception of the hospital. Over the past three decades, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital has been providing professional care for such patients to protect their urinary tract health. The extensive experience accumulated by the reconstruction

therapy and rehabilitation teams of the orthopedics and neurosurgery divisions has reached a level of maturity enabling the hospital to form a "Team Taiwan". The members of this Tzu Chi Team work hand in hand to create a safe and friendly medical environment for these patients with the support of Tzu Chi Foundation by harnessing the dedicated efforts and deep commitment of spinal cord injury



Mr. Lin Jen-Chieh pacing with a walker, his neuro-surgeon Director Tsai Sheng-Tsung (left), his physical therapist (right) and the crowd witness his miraculous recovery.



associations in each city and county of Taiwan.

Dr. Kuo Hann-Chorng further states that the local reconstruction centers set up in the four Tzu Chi Hospitals in northern, central, southern, and eastern Taiwan are capable of providing nearby care for spinal injury patients in cities and counties located within the geographic area served by the hospital. Recently, an APP titled “Spine Manager” has been created in collaboration with a patient named Yang Ching-Jen. This APP, which spinal cord injury patients are encouraged to help promote, reminds them of their current physical status (high, moderate, or low risk) and notifies them of upcoming follow-up appointments on a regular basis. In case of emergencies such as urinary retention late at night, patients can contact their case manager via the phone function of the APP. Their case manager will then locate a doctor in the vicinity of their homes who can solve the issue.

Dr. Kuo stresses that “patients who keep wallowing in their misery are an indication of lack of warmth and concern in society. Our goal is to make up for this lack.” Professional medical care assists patients in physical rehabilitation and restoration of body functions. The Tzu Chi Foundation, on the other hand, provides patients with living assistance and financial subsidies. The Foundation



Mr. Li Cheng-Tao, a Hualien resident, is deeply grateful for the dedicated support and assistance of the orthopedics team (group photo with Vice CEO Kuo Hann-Chorng, Dr. Chen Hao-Wen, and his wife).

even arranges vocational training for such patients to help them leave their misery behind and reintegrate into society.

The four regional centers will feature teams composed of medical specialists spanning the fields of neurosurgery, neurology, urology, orthopedics, plastic surgery, rehabilitation medicine, and psychosomatic medicine. These teams will provide spinal cord injury patients with optimal medical care during the acute and chronic stage. In addition, the Compassionate Medical Subsidy Program of Tzu Chi Medical Foundation will conduct reviews and assess the provision of subsidies for research

projects carried out by the Spinal Cord Injury Medical Reconstruction Center in the fields of innovative medical care, reconstructive care, and new medical technologies.

The Reconstruction Center Promotion Task Force has been formed by Vice CEO Kuo Hann-Chorng to accelerate the implementation of a wide range of spinal cord injury reconstruction tasks by Tzu Chi Medical Mission. Dr. Kuo and Dr. Tsai Sheng-Tsung, Director of the Department of Neurosurgery at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, serve as the convener and deputy convener of this task force. Director Tsai, Chen Sheng-Fu, Director of the Pediatric Urology Division of the Department of Urology, and Dr. Chen Hao-Wen, Attending Physician of the Department of Orthopedics, have disclosed the latest therapies and achievements.

Protection of the Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Well-Being of Spinal Injury Patients with Compassion as the Backup Force

The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation also actively participates in the care process for patients in the local medical reconstruction centers of the aforementioned four hospitals through the provision of medical subsidies, emergency aid, vocational

training, and disability benefits. In addition to turning these hospitals into medical reconstruction centers for spinal cord injury patients all over Taiwan and thereby enable them to reintegrate into society and regain their human dignity, we strive to become a national leader in the field of spinal cord injury care. Medical personnel and community volunteers of regional Tzu Chi chapters will also assist in volunteer medical consultations and house calls.

The regional reconstruction center teams will assist in the creation of databases for spinal cord injury patients and referral of such patients to qualified medical specialists for follow-up treatment. They also undertake volunteer medical consultation activities for such patients within the geographic area served by their hospital. Clinical care specialists spanning the disciplines of internal medicine, surgery, gynecology, pediatrics, plastic surgery, dentistry, psychosomatic medicine, and Chinese medicine are also enlisted to attend such activities. These teams also cooperate with regional Development Centers for the Spinal Cord Injured to rebuild the physical and mental well-being of spinal cord injury patients and restore their competencies and thereby achieve the holistic care goal of disease-, pain-, worry-, and anxiety-free spinal cord injury patients.



The unveiling ceremony of the "Tzu Chi Central District Spinal Cord Injury Medical Reconstruction Center" commenced on August 6, 2023 in Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital. The free clinic prepares a six-bed dental treatment area which is the department with the largest lineup.





The "Tzu Chi Northern District Spinal Cord Injury Medical Reconstruction Center" commenced on August 13, 2023 at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital.



The "Tzu Chi Southern District Spinal Cord Injury Medical Reconstruction Center" commenced on Sep. 16, 2023 at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital.

