

An Exceptional Nurse with a Background in Emergency Care Loves Challenges and Pushes for Achievements by Fostering Unity

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By Hong Jing-Ru



The 7th International Research Conference of the World Society of Disaster Nursing (WSDN) was held in Taipei in 2022. Nursing personnel of the emergency and emergency evacuation wards of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital participated in this conference. They took turns delivering presentations in oral and poster format. Ms. Chou Ying-Fang, Nursing Department Supervisor and driving force behind this project, observed with pride and affection how a new generation of nurses shared their achievements in a professional and confident manner with the goal of demonstrating the solid foundation and soft skills of the only medical center in eastern Taiwan in the field of disaster nursing. Since emergency care is her professional universe and training ground, she has single-handedly nourished and nurtured the emergency evacuation ward which integrates emergency and evacuation functions as her personal

garden plot. Her ultimate goal is to foster the harmonious unity and mutual progress of these two fields and maximize the benefits of holistic care through integrative medicine. Her achievements in this area fully manifest the value of her 14-year career in nursing.

Ying-Fang, a Kaohsiung native, completed a five-year junior college and two-year technical program at the Department of Nursing of Fooyin University. After her graduation, she made a decision with several of her classmates to see what's out in the world and submitted her resume to the hospitals farthest from her hometown. As a devout Taoist, her mother cast divination blocks in a temple to request divine guidance on which place would be best for her daughter. It turned out that "Tzu Chi" received seven positive answers. Despite the fact that she favored hospitals in northern Taiwan, she obeyed the divine will urged on by her mother. Her classmates who originally planned to join her all had a change of heart and she had to travel to her new workplace alone. On the way to her employment location, she encountered the traffic chaos caused by the typhoon flooding disaster on August 8, 2009. Fortunately, she was able to get on the only regularly dispatched, northbound high-speed rail train. After that, she caught a train on the TaiRail Eastern Trunk Line. It was an exhausting journey with twists and turns. Ying-Fang recalls that "my dad was very worried initially and urged me to come back home if I felt I didn't fit in. Shortly after I got on the train, the world suddenly stood still and there was no way back. Even if I wanted to bail out, there was no transportation available, so I had to stay in Hualien."

"My decision to embark on a career in nursing dates back to the Scholastic Aptitude Test I took in my third year of junior high school and my experience caring for a hospitalized family member over a period of two months. The human warmth displayed by the RN in her care and interactions with my grandmother made me realize that nursing was the right career for me. On top of that, I had no interest in going to high school since my older sister was really struggling with her high school subjects. Initially, my family didn't support my decision. My mom was of the opinion that nursing is too taxing because it requires shift work and removing patients' urine and feces." In her first year of junior college, the SARS pandemic hit Taiwan and her mom tried to persuade her to choose a different career because she thought that working in a hospital was too dangerous, but her daughter would not budge. She pointed out that she "has never regretted her decision to pursue a career in nursing. Looking back, I have really received a lot of help and assistance and have learned and grown more than many other people in the course of my career."

Training in Emergency Care – Giving Back in Gratitude by Taking over as Deputy Head Nurse

Emergency care was her first choice. Just like other newcomers, she was struggling with frequent challenges, difficulties, and setbacks and had to navigate repeated self-doubts regarding the suitability of this career path. Ms. Tsai Ya-Wen, a senior emergency RN, served as her clinical instructor. In addition to providing her with technical instructions, she offered personal guidance and encouragement at times when Ying-Fang was vulnerable and wavering. After meeting the required criteria upon completion of a two-month OTJ training program, she finally was able to perform her duties independently. In the following years of her professional career, she encountered unexpected opportunities such as advanced training and promotions to team leader and supervisor. Her nine-year stint in emergency care furnished ample nutrients and laid a solid foundation for her nursing career.

At first, she planned on returning to southern Taiwan upon expiry of her employment contract after a period of two to three years. However, her clinical emergency nursing abilities constantly improved, and she experienced rapid professional growth as a result of her active participation in the launch of a mass casualty incident mechanism in response to a series of crises and emergencies including tour bus rollover accidents involving Chinese and Korean tour groups, a cluster infection of acute gastroenteritis on campus, and the Hualien earthquake on February 6, 2018.

She also greatly enjoyed the climate of solidarity and cohesion in the emergency department. On top of that, she had spent 4 years to earn her Master's degree and was extremely busy, so there was no way for her to leave the hospital.

On the evening before her graduation from the Master's program in 2016, while she was contemplating a career change to Nurse Practitioner, Head Nurse Lu Chia-Yi came to probe her interest in the position of Deputy Head Nurse which had been vacant for six months. She also mentioned that she could still go where she wanted to go after the hospital accreditation. Ying-Fang shared that "I thought about the numerous benefits I had gained from the emergency and nursing departments and my Tzu Chi University instructors and decided that I should give back to the unit that made me grow as a professional. I therefore I agreed to stay." After this momentous decision, she served as Deputy Head Nurse of the Emergency Department, Head Nurse of the Emergency Evacuation Ward, and Supervisor of the Dedicated COVID-19 Ward for two years each. This series of assignments made her forge ahead



in fulfillment of her heavy responsibilities with no way back, which bears a striking similarity to her experience traveling alone to eastern Taiwan burdened with heavy luggage and braving the wind and rain to report for duty at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital.

First Taste of Advanced Training – Priceless Guidance by a Strict Teacher in the MN Nurse Practitioner Program

As for the advanced training programs, after completing each stage, she exclaimed that she was done with academics. However, each time she felt complacent, she was compelled to try something new and achieve a breakthrough. She freely admits that she was asking for trouble when signed up for the Master's and PhD programs. Nevertheless, she always strives to create a climate conducive to advanced training and joint learning and advancement of the team no matter which unit she is transferred to because she has personally experienced the hard work and rewards associated with the pursuit of academic studies, which has widened her horizon as a nursing professional, made her way of thinking and attitude more incisive, and reaped her innumerable benefits.

In her MN Nurse Practitioner program, she learned a mode of thinking outside the “comfort zone” of the nursing profession. The program duration was two years, and it took her one year to prepare her thesis. She spent another year completing her NP training and acquiring her license. During the course of this four-year study period, she had thought about giving up, but she kept telling herself that she had chosen this road and that she had to grit her teeth and keep going. Thinking back on her situation back then, she recalls that she needed someone to push her. She therefore chose a teacher widely regarded as very strict and demanding to spur herself on. She explains that she became the first Master's student under the tutelage of Assistant Professor Hsieh Mei-Lin of the Nursing Department at Tzu Chi University, “ I had a love-hate relationship with this extremely strict supervising professor.”

"I remember one instance where I couldn't take the stress anymore and deliberately went ghosting by ignoring all my messages. Teacher Hsieh went straight to the emergency department to complain to my Head Nurse Lu Chia-Yi: 'I have lost contact with her since one week ago. I have already seen through her tricks of hiding from her teacher.'" Ying-Fang points out that her decision to venture from NP into a career as NP exposed her to a brand-new ecosystem and completely different operation modes, which resulted in unanticipated fear and uneasiness in the initial stages. Assistant Professor Hsieh Mei-Lin who always stayed at her side served as her guide and mentor in her efforts to gain a gradual understanding of the nurse practitioner field. In addition to sharing her clinical experiences and exchanging arguments and opinions with her, she accompanied Ying-Fang in her constant attempts to surpass herself and grow professionally. They have been able to maintain this profound friendship and have stayed in touch even after Ying-Fang's graduation. Whenever Ying-Fang encounters an obstacle or hits a wall at work, her benevolent teacher who she can always ask for advice is her most solid support.

A Supervisor Who Helps Her Subordinates Realize Themselves

Due to her active and outgoing personality and her bold and jovial demeanor, Ying-Fang spreads joy and laughter wherever she appears. She gets along well with everyone and knows how to socialize and connect with people. After taking over as Deputy Head Nurse of the Emergency Department, she served as a down-to-earth supervisor who sometimes came across as a little cheeky but was always close with her team members and treated them with respect and courtesy. What makes her unique is that she actively encourages emergency nursing personnel to expose themselves to unfamiliar fields, which includes participation in exhibitions, academic presentations, and evidence-based nursing (EBN) competitions to demonstrate their professional competence beyond the confines of the hospital.

Ying-Fang remarks that "as a nurse with a background in emergency care, I'm aware that once you reach a certain plateau, work can become a little dull and monotonous no matter how passionate you are. Young people always expect themselves to achieve something. I always strive to give my young colleagues a vision and tickle their pride. My goal is to make work fun and interesting for everyone and I'll always be committed to forge ahead in unison with my team."

Ying-Fang adds with a chuckle that she has become a little softer since her promotion to Deputy Head Nurse. "When I was still a clinical instructor, I was a little stricter. I have high standards and tend to come off cold and aloof when I'm unhappy.



I can be pretty blunt and straightforward, so younger colleagues used to be scared of me and their hands would be trembling while they were holding their pens during duty handover.” She has a high degree of self-discipline and always sets the bar very high. Her training and professional development can be characterized as normal and average, and she had a pretty hard time in her Master’s program. Since she is not exceptionally gifted, she had to rely on hard work and effort to make the grade. She is therefore firmly convinced that her junior colleagues can do the same.

In view of the high turnover in the field of emergency care, how can supervisors not only pass on core nursing skills but also build a rapport with them? Reflecting on her time as a newcomer, she recalls being able to discern different personalities from her senior colleagues’ demonstrations and teaching approaches. Some of them were excellent listeners and would share their experiences and insights and interact with her in a warm and considerate manner. Others remained unflustered and circumspect under pressure and thereby invoked a sense of safety. These “nutrients” helped her master core skills and transformed her into a responsible nurse with the ability to accomplish tasks independently. A climate of mutual trust has been highly conducive to forging strong emotional bonds with her team members, while observations of the leadership styles of each head nurse helped her determine what kind of leader she wanted to become. Through a constant integration of insights, she was finally able to identify a direction for her career, which she describes as follows: “I strive to harness my influence as a supervisor to help my colleagues realize themselves.” Consequently, the tough and demanding senior colleague was gradually transformed into a deputy head nurse who is deeply committed to enabling a new generation of nurses to unleash their creativity.

From Emergency to Emergency Evacuation – Solidarity as the Top Priority

In the wake of the Hualien earthquake on February 6, 2018, the Emergency Department of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital launched an MCI (Mass Casualty Incident)

mobilization campaign involving the entire hospital staff with the goal of optimizing emergency rescue performance. After the incident, a large number of involved nurses organized their experiences for academic presentations. Deputy Head Nurse Chou Ying-Fang has been instrumental in catapulting her team onto the international stage. Her team members shared the achievements and highlights of the only medical center in eastern Taiwan in the field of emergency nursing at the 5th International Research Conference of the World Society of Disaster Nursing (WSDN) in Germany. This successful mission paired with the active promotion of a climate conducive to learning over a period of more than two years, bears clear testimony to Ying-Fang's personal growth.

Subsequently, the hospital administration initiated the planning procedures for the conversion of Ward 25 East into an Integrated Medical Emergency Evacuation Ward. One of the Emergency Nursing Department supervisors had to be selected for the post of head nurse of this new ward. 32-year-old Ying-Fang got the nod to serve as the youngest head nurse of the hospital at that time.

Despite the fact that she had been mentally prepared in several interviews conducted over a period of more than six months for this opportunity to hone and perfect her professional skills offered by the hospital, she was still torn up inside when she realized that she would have to leave her beloved emergency department.



She still recalls being in tears on the way from the nursing department to emergency after signing the Consent to Transfer Form. As the news spread, her team members were shocked and loathe to let her go. The members of the following shift broke out in tears at the last duty handover. The year-end appreciation meeting unexpectedly turned into a farewell party for Ying-Fang. Everyone on and off stage burst out crying and the event turned into an unforgettable shared memory of the emergency nursing team.

On the other hand, she couldn't help feeling nervous since she didn't have any practical ward experience as a former member of the emergency care team. After calm consideration, she realized that this could be a blessing in disguise. She knew that the converted Emergency Evacuation Ward 25 East would closely cooperate and engage in frequent interactions with the Emergency Department in the future. This new position therefore represented a perfect opportunity to push her limits as a nursing professional and familiarize herself with follow-up treatment patterns of emergency patients.

As a newly established unit, Ward 25 East underwent several changes and transformations. It was composed of previous members of each ward who had been selected to serve in this new unit and was therefore less stable and mature than other wards. The original supervisor had left the hospital due to personal career considerations. Deputy Head Nurse Chou Yun-Chuan personally took over the helm for two to three months. Ying-Fang completely understood that the team was upset at the prospect of an outside supervisor from the Emergency Department being brought in to take over. Ying-Fang thought to herself that the first gift she got from the emergency team was solidarity. She would bring this gift to a brand-new lineup!

This was her first appointment as a head nurse and Yun-Chuan was her first Deputy Head Nurse. She didn't expect her team members to be deferential or subservient since there was no foundation of mutual trust and affection, but since they were on the same team, she frankly told Yun-Chuan: "We're in the same boat! I promise you'll get your share of all the good stuff, but if there is adversity, we must carry the weight together!" The duo turned from complete strangers to an enviable team with strong bonds. As a result, the unit gained strength bit by bit. Around one year later, the team was stable and robust and started to participate in professional internal competitions organized by the hospital. It even achieved excellent results in large-scale external competitions. The transformed Ward 25 East gradually attracted wider attention. Ying-Fang built and developed her team in a planned manner. She also provides guidance to Yun-Chuan in learning by doing, which resembles the initial

training she received in the Emergency Department. She therefore has faith in the ability of her Deputy Head Nurse to play an indomitable role whenever needed.

As the Head Nurse to Lead the Way in Academic Presentations

Since most of her subordinates are relatively young, she always refers to them as her “children.” As a head nurse, she resembles a leader of a group of children who loves to take them on fun trips to different places. She encourages her team members to explore the world of nursing in an unrestrained manner. She not only tracks progress with eagle eyes and talks business but also cracks jokes and always has an open ear for complaints, worries, and anxieties of her subordinates.

Ying-Fang explains her leadership style in Ward 25 East with the following interesting analogy: “If I treat my children in Ward 25 East as a kindergarten class, they won’t be wild and unruly when I take them on a field trip. They will walk into the park with the group in a well-behaved manner and wait for their teacher’s command before they disperse and play.” In other words, this team needs a little guidance in their self-directed learning. When engaging in EBN (evidence-based nursing) academic research, they should not only focus on the discussion of the main research direction but also follow the required steps such as the identification of the problem, definition of the research scope, and arrange the necessary procedures....Ying-Fang always provides meticulous and comprehensive guidance to every team member in every step of the research process including the required homework, the adopted research methods, the level of detail, and the research design. She remarks that “if they are willing to commit themselves to their studies, there is no reason for me not to mentor them. Of course, I accompany them on their road to achievement.

This attitude of dashing ahead without hesitation has turned her into a head nurse who always stands by her subordinates in the eyes of her subordinates. She knows how to arouse the fighting spirit in her team and is always willing to join them with great determination and maximum effort in their struggle to save patient lives. By harnessing this spirit, she has trained a group of vibrant and energetic RNs, who stand out from the crowd in medical technology exhibitions and various nursing innovation competitions in Taiwan and abroad, radiating a powerful aura of academic expertise and solemn confidence, which is exceptionally astonishing! Numerous new-generation nurses view Ying-Fang as their hero and life changer. When she hears that kind of feedback she always exclaims with pleasant surprise: “It hasn’t occurred to me that I have had such a big impact on so many people!”

In 2019, Ying-Fang was admitted to the PhD program at the Tzu Chi University

Institute of Medical Sciences. The study process was agonizing, but each time she managed to push through, her skills reached the next level, and she discovered her perseverance in the face of challenges. All Ward 25 East colleagues were infected by her spirit and enrolled in two-year technical or college programs. At present, seven or eight members of the Emergency Department pursue advanced academic studies in Master's programs. Ying-Fang always treats her colleagues just like a mother who raises her children, which has turned the ward into a big family. As she observes how the seeds she has sown in the past germinate and grow in every person, she exclaims: "If I don't start learning something new, they will catch up and surpass me. I have to motivate myself to keep advancing."



Protecting Public Health by Taking on the Heavy Responsibility of Dedicated Ward Supervisor

In the wake of the Taroko Express derailment incident on April 2, 2021, the Emergency Department launched an MCI (Mass Casualty Incident) medical rescue support system. Ward 25 East was requisitioned as a designated ward for the victims of the incident. When Ying-Fang who had traveled back to her hometown for the Tomb Sweeping Festival, rushed back to the hospital the following day, she saw that the ward operations in a well-organized manner and the leadership performance of Deputy Head Nurse Yun-Chuan, who was on duty, was remarkable. As patients were successively discharged at the end of April, the Nursing Department started to discuss the promotion of Yun-Chuan to Ward Head Nurse in the near future. Ying-Fang, who was engaged in her doctoral studies at that time, could therefore prepare for her new role of supervisor candidate. Initially, she thought she would have a buffer of at least one or two years. She was therefore caught off guard when the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly broke out in May 2021. After the hospital converted Ward 25 East, Ward 25 East, and Ward 25 West into a dedicated ward for admission of critical COVID patients, Ying-Fang was appointed supervisor of this dedicated ward in the face of grave danger in June.

Her transfer was announced out of the blue. Over a short period of only two years, she had gone through thick and thin and formed deep bonds with her colleagues in Ward 25 East. They asked "what are we going do without you?" When learning about the promotion of the head nurse to supervisor, all her team members

were inconsolably sad. After falling silent for a moment and taking a deep breath, Ying-Fang slowly declared “I will watch over you from another place. The more power I have the better I can protect you!” She wouldn’t leave them but rather use her larger protective hands to support, look after, and accompany them in another way. These words from the bottom of her heart were meant to comfort her team members. The resilient Yun-Chuan took over the baton and led by example as the new head nurse. In the face of this sudden change and fait accompli, they made a decision to collect their emotions and unite to fight the virus.

At that time, the number of critical cases and death rate started to climb, and family cluster infections and transmissions chains spread like wildfire in Hualien. Tension was rising among team members at the slightest sign of trouble. Right after her promotion to supervisor, she immediately had to take over responsibility for the dedicated ward and the four-in-one controlled area. In view of the special duties at a time of emergency, her constant concern about the patients’ health condition, and her worries about the care workload of her colleagues, it was evident that she was under enormous stress. When she delivered her weekly reports in the Jing Si Abode, she was able to witness up close how the Dharma Master fulfills her role as a spiritual



leader in the contributions and sacrifices of Tzu Chi Members all over the world with the goal of benefiting the efforts of sentient beings and cherishing the sacrifices of medical professionals. She was deeply touched by this and felt a strong urge to join Tzu Chi. In 2022, she underwent training to become a Tzu Chi Commissioner. From then on, she no longer cast divination blocks to get an answer when facing a major life decision or her soul was disoriented but instead drew a paper slip with a Jing Si Aphorism to gain relief and transform her state of mind.

Altruistic Leadership and Pursuit of the Common Good in Unison with the Team

In the eyes of Ms. Chung Hui-Chun, Director of the Nursing Department, Ying-Fang is an altruistic young supervisor, who knows how to empower her subordinates and has her own unique leadership style. She resembles a magnet which pulls people together no matter how chaotic, weird, or unmanageable a unit is. Ying-Fang points out that “my team members don’t follow my commands me because I’m a supervisor, but rather because we pursue the common good together at the same place.” How can she motivate people to willingly join her on her path? Maybe it is because she treats everyone in a sincere manner and has the best interests of the team in mind in whatever she does.

She explains that “I’d like to do a lot of things by myself, but I can’t, so I express my wishes to the team. If I didn’t have the support of my children in Ward 25 East, I couldn’t get anything done. We grow together and keep each other’s company.” When she manages or educates people, she always strives for unity and solidarity. She wants to be there for them at every juncture of their career!

She enjoys relaxed interactions filled with human warmth. She never shirks her responsibility and always takes the lead pushing her team ahead and even adopts a fierce demeanor in her teaching efforts if deemed necessary. Ying-Fang combines stern exhortations and corrections with warm consideration for others. She remarks that “my children are so cute. If I scold them, they sobbingly apologize to me: “I’m so sorry! I let you down! Actually, I can’t bring myself to get angry at them and am often touched by them. I always treat them with sincerity, and they bear that in mind.” It gives her great joy and satisfaction to watch them thrive. “They really trust me and I don’t mind if they move a bit slower as long as they follow along.” The emergency care training has given her the ability to perform well under pressure and persevere to the end. When she encounters a situation where it is difficult to push people to keep up, she waits patiently because she always has faith in their ability to catch up.

As for the difficulties and challenges she faces as a supervisor, it all boils down to things beyond her control or situations with no way out. Policy and duty directions and the bigger picture often complicate things and require consideration of a wider range of dimensions. This tends to lead to lack of direction and dilemmas in the search for solutions. However, the best way to relieve stress is wining and dining, a habit that is not only hard to kick but also results in extra weight which is difficult to shed. She states jokingly that “it’s tough to just gain weight without getting taller! Is this really the price we have to pay for growing professionally? Haha.”

Some people have described her as a person who has subverted common notions of supervisors and is the most unusual supervisor they have ever seen. Ying-Fang admits with a chuckle that her baptism in Tzu Chi humanities may be the reason for her harmless and innocent appearance later on. Her style, conduct, and achievements are extraordinary and fire the imagination of a younger generation of nurses regarding the road of advancement with a multifaceted outlook and more room to give free rein to their talent.

After the dedicated ward was dissolved when the pandemic petered out, the ward supervisor returned to her original NP training and education duties. At the end of 2022, she was appointed concurrently as director of the Clinical Skills Center attached to the Department of Education. In her new role, she is responsible for the management of educational services and clinical skill acquisition by trainees on a hospital-wide scale. Ms. Chung Hui-Chun, Director of the Nursing Department, has high hopes for her to cooperate with the Department of Education in the establishment of a Clinical Incubation Center for nursing personnel.

The former youngest head nurse has turned into the youngest supervisor. The timeline of her nursing career and promotion path has been extremely compressed and serendipity has pushed her forward on the path of cultivation to become a backbone member of the management staff. On this path, she produced many rare and unusual results. She is deeply grateful for the guidance and support provided by senior colleagues, and in particular to Ms. Chung Hui-Chun, her first coach and trainer. She points out that Ms. Chung “provided me with omnipresent support and protection in the course of my leadership and management training. She never shied away from telling me about the hardship and difficulties of being a supervisor, and she helped me realize that this role was the only way for me to open up more possibilities for my beloved team.”

A delegation of the Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital Nursing Department participates in the 7th International Research Conference of the World Society of Disaster Nursing



(WSDN) held in 2022. Ms. Chou Ying-Fang (fifth right) and her emergency and emergency evacuation ward colleagues share their research findings in the field of disaster nursing at this conference.

Ms. Hsieh Mei-Lin (front row, center) leads a delegation composed of her student Chou Ying-Fang and members of the emergency nursing team in the submission and presentation of papers at the meeting of the Council of National Nursing Association Representatives, ICN's global governing body, held in Singapore in 2019.

A nine-year stint in emergency care nourished Chou Ying-Fang's (second right) transformation into a mature and independent nursing professional. This image was taken at a birthday party in the Emergency Department in 2010.

A delegation led by Medical Secretary Li Yi (first right), who is seen in this picture guiding Chou Ying-Fang (second right) and accompanying team members in drills and discussions, participates in a healthcare quality competition held by the Joint Commission of Taiwan.

Chou Ying-Fang, who can be seen in the last row giving a thumbs up, is firmly committed to promoting a climate conducive to learning and actively encourages emergency and emergency evacuation ward team members to participate in internal and external nursing competitions to enhance their professional competence.

Head Nurse Chou Ying-Fang and Deputy Head Nurse Chou Yun-Chuan jointly lead the nursing team of Ward 25 East.

The nursing team offer their congratulations Supervisor Chou Ying-Fang and Deputy Head Nurse Hsiao Chi-Yu of the Emergency Department receive their certificates in the same period in 2022.

Chou Ying-Fang's unique leadership style has given rise to a new generation of highly professional, confident nurses (from left to right: RN Liang Meng-Ting, Head Nurse Yun Chuan of Ward 25 East, and RN Kao Li-Sheng of the Emergency Ward). 🏡