

Health-Care Program for the Poor Community in the Philippines

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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In correspondence with the goal to promote and protect good health worldwide of UN, Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi volunteers in the Philippines, after ten years of safeguarding locals' health, look to do more for the poor community by bringing Tzu Chi's medical assistance to the country. Tzu Chi's long lasting friendship with the poor people of San Mateo, Rizal started from 2009 with the compassionate relief to damages caused by typhoons, namely Typhoon Ketsana. This relationship was taken one step further with an agreement that will benefit the needy afflicted with tuberculosis and rabies in providing adequate healthcare.

Bringing medical care to needy in San Mateo

On January 22, 2016, a cooperative agreement was signed between Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital and the government of San Mateo. San Mateo, approximately 24 kilometers northeast of Manila, has a population of about 230,000. However, its government has long lacked an adequate budget to look after the health of its residents. In recent years, tuberculosis (TB) and an increasing number of people bitten by animals has become a major health threat at the region, with around 1,000 recorded TB cases every year. Fortunately, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital will provide a three-year supply of tuberculosis medicine and rabies vaccines in San Mateo to help the local government tackle these serious health issues. In addition, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital agreed to train healthcare workers to be part of a TB-treating project. To treat TB successfully, patients need to take the medicine for 6 months. DOTS (directly observed treatment, short-course) is the best curative method for TB according to WHO. These local healthcare workers will supervise patients taking their daily medicine in the future.

With the help from Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital in place, San Mateo Super Health Center gathered children suffering from TB from the neighboring areas and distributed the first dose of TB medicine to them. Knowing her sick baby will receive 6 months of medicine, one of the mothers expressed her gratitude. "I am very thankful I could receive 6 months of medicine. Because these medicines are expensive it's not something I can afford. So I'm very grateful to the Tzu Chi Foundation for giving this to me." The mother said.

Provide rabies vaccines

Besides medicine for TB, Tzu Chi is providing 200 rabies shots every three months to ease the medical burden. Rabies is a deadly disease, and once the symptom developed, the patients will most certainly die. Fortunately, post-exposure prophylaxis is possible because of the slow progression of rabies virus. If rabies vaccine is given in time to the animal-bitten victim, the disease will never develop. "We are heavily burdened by the incident of animal bites. Every year, the number of victims is more than 2,000 in a year." Health Bureau director, Dr. Anna Sochaco said.

Plans for expansion to other areas

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This collaboration is only the beginning, as there are plans to extend this partnership to more medically deprived areas. “This collaboration is only the beginning, as there are plans to extend this partnership to more medically deprived areas.” said Samson T.L. Chang, deputy representative of Taipei Economic and Culture Office in the Philippines. This partnership of health organizations also helps strengthen the friendship between the two countries.