

Great compassion without regrets – Introduction to Tzu Chi’s Medical Mission

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

Tuesday, 25 November 2008 00:00



Dharma Master Cheng Yen realized from over ten years of experience in relief efforts that poverty very often is caused by illness. With the medical mission on track, Master Cheng Yen made a vow to build a hospital in the eastern part of Taiwan. The eastern seaboard of Taiwan lacked medical facilities, and Master Cheng Yen wanted to build a hospital that would provide needed services for the local population. Her mission was “Patient-oriented medicine with respect for life”. She wanted to raise the medical standards in the eastern part of Taiwan.

Founded on the ideal of compassionate Buddhism, planning work for the new hospital began in 1979. The project overcame many difficulties and obstacles. Slogans were designed to awaken the compassion of kind-hearted people, calling upon them to join with the tens of thousands of other people to build the world of Tzu Chi together. Eventually, the collected force of love from many paved the way to success.

In August of 1986, the Buddhist Tzu Chi General Hospital was opened in Hualien. This was the beginning of a major milestone for the Tzu Chi Medical mission, the beginning of “Safeguarding Life and Safeguarding Love”.

The hospital was built with the ideology of helping the poor. From the beginning, the hospital tried to abolish the prepayment system required by all other hospitals in Taiwan. This aroused much skepticism from society and medical practitioners. However, it did not take long for the Taiwanese health department to review the prepayment system and give their approval. The department even notified all medical facilities in Taiwan to abolish the prepayment requirement, a huge blessing for the sick and poor.

With the opening of the hospital, the hospital volunteer system was created. They supported the hospital staff and provided counseling for patients and their families. The partnership between hospital staff and volunteers provided care and support from check-in to release for the patient, their family. Tzu Chi had achieved the long sought-after goal of complete care for a patient’s body, mind, and soul.

Soon after the success of the Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, Tzu Chi hospitals were built in Yuli, Kuanshan, Dalin, Taipei, and Taichung. Step by step, starting from free medical outreach in the villages, Tzu Chi medical outreach now covers the whole of Taiwan from villages to cities, from mountains to seas.

Tzu Chi was established in 1966 and was led by Master Cheng Yen. She pioneered free medical services for the poor in the Hualien and Taitung areas. The Tzu Chi Free Medical Clinic opened in 1972 at Ren Ai street in Hualien. In 1986, Tzu Chi General Hospital began operations. Tzu Chi continues the effort to provide free medical services to remote locations and to the indigenous people of Taiwan.

In 1996, a group of doctors, pharmacists, and nurses from major hospitals were motivated by

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Master Cheng Yen. In response to her guidelines of “Treat not only the disease, but the person as well as their well-being”, they formed the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA). Eager to give back to society, this group of medical professionals created another channel for themselves to devote their specialized skills. This network of compassionate health care providers gives much needed medical relief to the most medically barren lands.

Great compassion has no limits, and Tzu Chi charity work entered the international scene. More and more effort is devoted to international relief work. The main focus of the Tzu Chi International Medical Volunteers is to care for the sick and poor at their local residences. Free medical services even include surgery in order to provide more complete care. For major international disasters, Tzu Chi provides coordinated relief efforts and mobilizes medical rescue work.