

Doctors And Students Come to Learn From ‘Silent Mentors’

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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In September, doctors and students from China and Taiwan came to Hualien to participate in the five days of simulated surgery with eight ‘silent mentors’. They are people who agreed to donate their bodies to the medical school of Tzu Chi University after their passing. These donations have given the students of the university a rare opportunity; they can carry out surgical simulation before they commence work on live patients. For cultural and religious reasons, few people in Asia are willing to make such a donation and, as a result, medical students have little chance to practice.

The university invites doctors and students from elsewhere to take part in this rare opportunity. The practice was held this year between September 5 and 10, with participants from Shanghai Jiaotong and Yunnan Dali universities in China. So eager were the medical students of Jiaotong to take part that more than 100 applied; after interviews with professors, just over 10 were chosen. Finally, six were selected to go. Li Dong, a doctor at the university, said that, at the same time, it had other oversea summer exchange programs. “The most popular was the surgical simulation class at Tzu Chi University,” he said. “Only here is this opportunity. The class was praised by senior students of the university.” For Li himself, it was the first choice.



On September 10, about 200 people took part in a ceremony at Tzu Chi University’s medical school to honor and say farewell to the ‘silent mentors’. They included teachers and students from the university and doctors of Tzu Chi general hospitals, students from Jiatong and Yunnan Dali and Tzu Chi volunteers. Teachers and students put their hands together in front of the eight mentors – Ong Han-xi, Cai Su-zhen, Zhang Sai-lin, Liu Chuan-de, Wu Zheng-chang, Wu You-zheng, Cai Zi-en and Yi Wen-qin.

Standing in front of the coffins, one of the students, Guo Shu-hua, wept as he spoke: “Teacher, you are very great, in allowing us to do any surgery on your bodies. You are like members of our family. We thank you, teacher.” Nothing is certain in life. Several of the mentors were young and then passed away because of illness; the youngest was Wu Zheng-chang who was only 33. He used to get up every morning at five o’clock to help his mother do recycling and volunteered at Tzu Chi’s parent-and-child classes. During his illness, he still carried a camera weighing five kilograms to record the foundation’s work. His younger brother, Wu Geng-xian, paid this tribute to him: “What he did was perhaps not a great achievement but the seeds of goodness are the best gift he could have given us.”

The silent mentors of surgical simulation must be delivered to Tzu Chi University within eight hours of their passing. It is completely different to the traditional funeral that is held at home. The donation is a great torment for the family of their beloved, as Liu Li-mei, the daughter of

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Teacher Liu Chuan-de, explained: “when my father decided to make this donation, my mother was dumbfounded. She asked three times ‘do you want to come home or to Tzu Chi?’. Father insisted, saying that he wanted to stay with Tzu Chi. Finally, Mother agreed to his request. One day she saw him in a dream, in which he said ‘I have everything, I am in need of nothing’. She saw him had a pile of uniform and a tag with his name next to him.” The family believes that Father is walking with Tzu Chi on the path of Bodhissatva.



All those who took part in the ceremony and the surgical practice felt that they had benefited greatly. Lin Ying-chao, a doctor at the Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital, said that, every time he saw a doctor, who graduated of the Tzu Chi's medical school, treating a patient, he felt that they were different to other students. “This is because the silent mentors have given them a great deal of humanity and taught them to have deep consideration for every patient,” he said.

Finally, Wang Ben-rong, the principal of Tzu Chi University, presented a plaque of gratitude to the families of the mentors. Their names and a glazed urn containing part of their ashes were places in Great Giving Hall. The story of their lives will be a guiding light on the student's path of learning.