

Free Medical Clinic at Taipei Station

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Volunteers from the Tzu Chi Foundation held a free medical clinic for foreign workers inside Taipei railway station. More than 100 came to the clinic, including some who had traveled from central and southern Taiwan. The clinic has been held once every one or two months on the second Sunday of the month since 2003.

The date was chosen to facilitate workers who have only one day off a week; many come from other parts of the island to Taipei to meet their compatriots, talk their mother language and eat their traditional food. That day the large hall of the station was crowded and noisy with people; you could hear many different languages. In one corner of the hall, there was a group of volunteers in blue uniforms and several queues of people for the different services of the clinic.

One of the foreign volunteers, wearing the Tzu Chi vest, was carrying a board on which was written “Free Medical Check-up, Follow Me”. The volunteer walked in the middle of the station among the people seated on the floor, seeking people who needed help. Many said to him (her): “we are very healthy, thank you”. Another said: “very good, I must have my teeth cleaned”.

Of the different services, the teeth and eye sections had long queues outside. The volunteers used red lines to mark them out, enabling the foreign worker friends to queue up in an orderly fashion. The dentists wore glasses attached to their heads for their examinations: doctors in the ear, nose and throat section used a medical light: the patients rinsed their mouth with water from PET bottles. The equipment was simple – it was the result of the hard work of the volunteers who had to overcome many difficulties. They did it to provide a rare opportunity for their foreign friends to see a dentist.



Mr Ruan from Vietnam attended the clinic for the first time; he was introduced to it by a friend. In the two years he has been working in Taiwan, he has never seen a dentist. He said: “I thank Tzu Chi very much for organizing this service.”

The clinics have been held for 10 years – among the crowd of people appeared a temporary medical centre that provides a warm service to the patients.

They began in 2003 and have been held every one or two months on the second Sunday of the month. It was a joint initiative of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association in northern district with the Foreign Labor Bureau of Taipei City, Taipei City Hospital, Heping Branch and the Taiwan Railways Administration. They decided to organize “Health Checks for Foreign Migrant Workers”. The clinics include internal medicine, eyes, teeth, gynecology, recovery and mind and

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body, with physical examinations and consultations. For many years, they were held in a tent outside Taipei railway station. From October 2012, the clinic moved inside the station building.

The foreign workers have medical insurance but are very busy in their work. The only day off is Sunday, when most medical clinics are closed. Add to that the language barrier and it is hard for them to see doctors. Tzu Chi volunteer Huang Xiang-lin said: “through many years of these clinics, I have discovered that many foreign workers often have problems like colds, irritated skin, and autonomic instability due to the stress.”

They live and work far away from home; sometimes this causes hidden spiritual stress. Li Jia-fu, a psychiatrist at the Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, listens patiently and offers advice to the foreign worker friends. He has been attending the clinics since they started ten years ago and knows intimately their mental problems and medical worries. He said: “Many medical conditions are a cumulative result of psychological pressure.”



For this clinic, there were more than 100 people, of whom a dozen sought help at the psychiatric section. Dr Li said: “the foreign worker friends pass information to each other over mobile phones or other networks. Some came specially from central or south Taiwan to attend the clinic.”

Once, there was a foreign worker lingering nearby the free clinic; a volunteer approached her and found that she had made the journey specially to express her thanks to Dr Li. After coming to his clinic, she had listened to his advice and reorganized her life routine. As a result, her physical help improved. Dr Li said: “during the clinic, the foreign worker friends can talk to the volunteers, relieve the pressure on them and put their feelings in order. If they can resolve their psychological problems, they can more easily cure many physical ailments.”

The workers must wait in line several times, from the registration process to providing materials for their medical file. There are volunteers from different countries who help them complete the procedures.

During the free clinic, many people of different countries came as interpreters. One of them, Jin Ji, came from Vietnam ten years ago and lives in the Wanhua district of Taipei. She said: “when I started doing translation, I was very nervous. But, when I met many people from my home country, I was very happy. In Vietnam, you could not possibly have free medical care. When I see here so many doctors and different specialties, I am very moved!”

In Taipei railway station, because the love among them, people no longer felt alone.

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