

The Tears of a Pharmacist

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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On the side of a quiet road was a grocery store. Nobody was in sight, only beautiful red flowers blooming under the early spring sun... "Grandpa, we are here to visit you, are you doing well these days?" Grandpa Wang opened his eyes and looked at the Tzu Chi volunteers in front of him. He said nothing, but nodded.

Grandmother has high blood sugar

Grandpa Wang is familiar with the medical staff from Tzu Chi. Once a month, they come to Jianshan, Taoyuan district in Kaohsiung city to do medical checks of each household where the elderly live. "Your blood pressure is good, blood sugar level normal and your breathing is smooth. Your heart rate is steady. You are very healthy. How old are you?" Hearing his answer, Dr. San-Jiang Wu, who is one of the medical team, exclaimed: "You will be 100 years old in three months!" Grandpa Wang calmly replied that, apart from being physically healthy, his mind was also very coherent. He ran all the business in the grocery shop himself.

An old dog rose lazily from the floor as Mr. Wang's wife appeared in a wheelchair pushed by her personal assistant. After her stroke, Mrs. Wang's head was drooping and saliva dripped involuntarily. Volunteer Xiu-Chuan Wang patiently held her hand and taught her rehabilitation exercises; then she measured her blood sugar level. "Two hundred and ninety three, your blood sugar level is very high..." Upon hearing the measurement, pharmacist Zhu-Mao Yang quickly asked for Mrs. Wang's medical record. He checked that the medicine prescribed was correct and learned from the personal assistant that Mrs. Wang took them on time...

Years of medical experience led Dr. Yang to ask: "What did Mrs. Wang just eat?" The personal assistant shook her head. Dr. Yang persisted and Mrs. Wang said, barely intelligibly: "herbal tea... the natural kind..." Later it became clear that Mrs. Wang had asked her personal assistant for canned herbal tea. "Grandma Wang, a canned beverage is not natural. You must not drink it!" Dr. Wu patiently reminded Mrs. Wang. Seeing how she started to nod in agreement rather than give them a blank look, the visiting medical staff were relieved and left to visit the next household.

Unaware of growing gout

"Hey? Why do I hear Da Ai TV?" The medical crew asked themselves as they went in front of Mr. Yan's house and saw him watching Da Ai television on the bed; he is paralyzed. Everyone jokingly asked: "Do you watch Da Ai TV because you know we are coming?" Mr. Yan waved his hand and said: "no, no, I watch Da Ai TV every day, I like watching it. It's about helping people, it's really good."

Dr. Wu smiled and held his hand. "Fine, fine, we know. Let me take your blood pressure..." Suddenly, Dr. Wu went silent and stared intently at Mr. Yan's hand. There were obvious lumps on each joint of the fingers. Dr. Wu asked: "Do you know what these lumps are?" Mr. Yan shook

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his head. Dr. Wu asked again: "Have you had your uric acid tested? These lumps are very likely gout." Again Mr. Yan shook his head, unaware of gout, an arthritic condition due to the build-up of excess uric acid. Pharmacist Yang looked into Mr. Yan's medical pouch and looked at Dr. Wu while shaking his head, saying: "he has no medication for gout..."

Dr. Wu was anxious and asked the accompanying nurse if they had any kit for taking a blood sample. He told Mr. Yan: "if gout is untreated, the kidneys and other organs can get into trouble, this is really serious." Seeing the serious looks of the medical staff, Mr. Yan assured everyone: "My wife will take me to the hospital down the hill tomorrow. I will tell the doctor that I want to do a blood test." On hearing this, everyone heaved a sigh of relief and reminded Mr. Yan times and again to take a uric acid test. "Thank you all, may God always be with you." He resumed chatting with everyone cheerfully. When the medical crew left his home, they heard him say loudly: "God bless you all!"

No Painkillers in sight



The strong stench of feces wafted along the mountain breeze, hitting the medical staff as they sat next to Grandma Wen and chatted with her about her life. She lost one eye and recently broke her thigh bone. Losing her ability to move, she can no longer care for herself and is resigned to spending the whole day on the bed, wearing diapers. Through the window came the lonely calls of a cricket calls; the occasional barks of dogs made the landscape ever more desolate. Dr. Wu observed how everyone smelled the unpleasant odor but nobody reacted badly. Sensing this, he could feel his heart throbbing, moved by this selfless gesture shown by everyone. Unconsciously, he recalled his path to becoming a doctor. It started from a great ambition, went through the ups and downs of interpersonal relationships and achieved fame and prestige. Despite what he had achieved, the passion to relieve the suffering of the world dwindled day by day ... until the day he attended a Tzu Chi International Medical Association conference. Through providing medical services in free health clinics, he gradually rediscovered the noble mission of a doctor.

Grandma Wen lived in a valley and all her family had moved away for work. Her living area was confined to the bed and the tiny table next to it. On the table, there were a small canned beverage, an unfinished bottle of water and various unlabeled medicine bottles. When she was bored, the only thing Grandma Wen could do was watch television. When she wanted to talk to somebody, she could only do it to the rag doll on her bed ... Yang looked at her medicine pouch and found that the painkiller and blood pressure medication she needed most had ran out. Looking into her eyes and feeling how much hardship Grandma Wen had to go through, he could no longer hold back his tears. Dr. Wu shared this feeling with Yang and quickly wrote a prescription for Grandma.

At noon, neglecting their lunch, Yang and Teng-Wei Chen, the team's driver, rushed to the free health clinic in Baolai Primary School to get Grandma Wen her prescription. With loving

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kindness, they also packed a warm lunchbox for her. Going back down the winding mountain roads, they personally delivered the medicine and meal to Grandma Wen.

Free health clinic - a place to rediscover love Since participating in the free health clinic in 2003, San-Jiang Wu often felt helpless at the lack of medical resources and public health knowledge in the mountain regions. In the most secluded places, there are too often only senior citizens left behind; they are ridden with diseases that they do not even know themselves. A 73-year-old Grandma Zeng has contracted Parkinson's disease, high blood pressure and severe diabetes all at the same time. Although her family and personal assistant took good care of her, they did not have the time to spend accompanying her. Only when her neighbor, Grandma Chen, visited her, did she start to converse in her Bunong dialect. Otherwise, Grandma Zeng was silent.

"Sometimes, they just need someone who cares about them." Dr. Wu said as he lightly massaged Grandma Chen's back bone. Such a gentle gesture has greatly relieved her ailing bone spurs, tiny pointed outgrowths of the bone. From his ten years of working in free health clinics, Dr. Wu really hoped that more medical staff will join Tzu Chi's medical association. Through personal and comprehensive care, they can bring warmth and hope to those unseen and uncared for and restore the joy of being alive.

After the final home visit at 2 p.m., the medical crew packed up their equipment and held a small sharing session in Baolai Primary School. Yang cried emotionally as he spoke about the patients they visited. Sitting among the audience, Dr. Tian-Hao Yeh was also upset. He looked up and joined his palms, as if praying to heaven in thanks. As the team leader for this free health visit, he had been worrying about the trip because of a storm the night before. Thinking about the old people in the mountains waiting for them and the medical crew's hopes and dedication, he told himself: "this is a good deed, I am sure God will bless us". Indeed, this free health clinic for the Liugui and Taoyuan area on March 23, 2014 was completed smoothly and successfully.

Love in the mountains and beauty among the people



Dr. Tian-Hao Yeh, San-Jiang Wu and Yi-Hong Chen specialize in surgery, internal medicine and gynaecology. After the free health clinic, they took another car and drove toward the more rural Shishanli region in Liouguei district. About halfway up the hill, there was a tiny, run-down mud hut. From its crumbling walls, they saw a bamboo forest behind the hut. Grandpa Pan, a blind 87-year-old, lives here alone. Apart from routinely caring for his health, this trip had another mission — giving him a haircut.

Grandpa Pan lost his sight gradually. Sometimes he acted irrationally, although his mind was very coherent. His solitary lifestyle caused him to put up a strong defense against everyone. A few months ago, when Tzu Chi volunteers visited him, he ignored everyone. But now, whenever

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he heard the volunteers coming, he would walk on his thin cane outside to the door and wait for them patiently. "This candy is for you, come let us take your blood sugar level." Everyone surrounded Grandpa Pan and coaxed him like a child. The candy they gave him was actually vitamin C. Apart from his eyesight and mild skin condition, he was in great health. He sat obediently as volunteer Mei-Lian Lin cut his hair. He even requested a specific length for the cut. But Mei-Lian knew that he didn't shower so she sneakily cut it shorter for him.

"Do you still drink?" Mei-Lian asked while she was cutting his hair. "No, do you see any liquor bottle?" Grandpa Pan answered anxiously.

"I smell it. Don't lie to me" Mei-Lian said.

"I am not drinking because I don't have money to buy it." The old grandpa made up an excuse just like a child. "Fine! I hope I don't smell alcohol again next time. We brought you food, it's on the table. Remember to eat it," Mei-Lian reminded him.

"I don't want to eat it." Everyone expected this response but quietly they observed how he walked to the table and reached out for the lunch box. His contented smile was apparent.

Dr. Wu put away his stethoscope and pointed to the flower bush in front of Grandpa Pan's house. "I see these flowers everywhere today, what are they?" Seeing where he was pointing, Tian-Hao smiled and replied: "They are bougainvilleas! They are in season now!" Taking a few deep breaths of the fresh air in the mountains, Dr. Wu murmured: "They are really beautiful, so beautiful!"

(Written by Jing-Mei Chang in Kaohsiung 23/03/2013)