

Diverse Donations Great Giving and Great Utilization

Written by Chin-Lon Lin, M.D.

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“Be able to give up all that is difficult to give up: fortune, loved ones, and country. Whether inside or outside the Dharma, there is nothing to be stingy about; be willing to bestow all to others: your head, your eyes, your marrow, your brain.” These are familiar teachings from the Sutra of Measureless Meanings, but they actually convey a state of challenge in Great Giving. Apart from material possessions, even the human body can be donated to help out others.

Ancient Chinese teaching clearly tells us, “The body, down to hair and skin, is gift from our parents, so we must cherish and not damage it.” Yet, the Still Thoughts states, “In life, there is no right of ownership, but only the privilege of use”. Thus whether we’re alive or after our passing, we must properly and fully make good use of our bodies from birth, throughout our growth, and in death. We should transform whatever unutilized into the greatly utilized. This ideal has manifested precisely through Tzu Chi Medical Mission’s two-decade endeavor to fulfill the Buddha’s teaching, by campaigning for diverse organ donations.



Consider the umbilical cord blood that can be collected when the newborn first parts from its Mother, or bone marrow and blood stem cells that can be used to save lives without hurting the donor. If death comes upon us unexpectedly, we can bequeath our remains to medical study and thus elevate ourselves to become the silent mentors. If we were to pass on from rare diseases, then we ought to donate our bodies to scientific research and become teachers in dissection lessons. Should we become brain dead, then we can bestow our organs or skeletal tissues, to give a fellow dying human a fighting chance for survival.

During the learning process of Tzu Chi medical professionals, a third year student will get his/her first experience in dissection by utilizing bodies donated by silent mentors. This is followed by coursework in pathology. From their sixth or seventh year, up to their internship, or even for young doctors in residency, they would come across surgical training, in which case they go through simulated operations on the silent mentors. In every stage, the courageous and selfless contributions of those Bodhisattvas gone by made the difference; they have become the best teachers of future physicians. They are the silent mentors in Anatomy, in Surgical Simulation, and in Pathology. Anatomy and Physiology is always an overwhelming course for a medical student. However, with the Tzu Chi Anatomy curriculum, not only does this first detailed encounter with the human body trigger a sharp impression, the experience in itself installs a solid foundation of medical humility. The leading characters in these anatomy classes, or as the Venerable Master calls them: “the best silent teachers”, are the great sages who bequeathed their unutilized remains at the end of their journey on earth. They are the “silent mentors”, or Teachers of Great, Noble Physical Body.

To best express gratitude to these silent mentors and their families, Tzu Chi conducts the most

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respectful and solemn ceremonies on their behalf. Furthermore, the Foundation earnestly tries to ensure that these corpses from Great Giving are indeed fully and greatly utilized. Therefore, Tzu Chi University employs ultra-low temperature nitrogen fast freezing technology for storage, such that the bodies can maintain life-like flexibility upon defrosting. Another development that facilitated these teachers' Great Utilization is the Da-Ti Surgery Simulation course that began to be offered on May 26th, 2002.

The trainings provided in the Simulation Surgery course, from the still study of anatomy to the animated exercise in surgery, are experiences that mirror the transition from flat, black and white photos to 3-dimensional vivid and colorful holograms. Not only do medical students and intern physicians get to practice basic techniques, even the attending doctors and chief surgeons have the opportunity to demonstrate the most challenging and intricate methods. Therefore, this class brings profound benefits to the clinical treatment of major illnesses.



From Simulation Surgery, there come forth many aspects of positive contributions toward medical science. First and foremost, the silent mentors fulfill the ideals of great medicine kings described in Buddhist canon, who dedicated themselves to educating the masses. Furthermore, the university gains some top-notch health professionals, as well as an insightful course in humanity, where both professors and student alike observe the sacrifices of the silent mentors and emulate their example of Great Giving. Likewise, the family also benefits greatly from the program. Some kin of these donors reflected that their loved ones never garnered such level of respect while alive, which they find inspirational and moving. Lastly, through the improved training of doctors, future patients consequently shall receive higher quality care and enjoy more compassionate interactions.

With respect to the current technological advances, I must remind my fellow medical practitioners of the following. Whether you are a student, a resident doctor, or an attending doctor, the three principle components of medical study: physiology, pathology, and pharmacology are the most fundamental skills. Only after attaining a solid grasp of these fundamentals, can we then properly accumulate our specialties. Also, remember that to be educated in the humanities especially implies selfless contributions toward others, and so the ideals of "making the patient be your focus and be respectful toward life" must become a key component in your career.

Advancements in medical sciences owe immensely to discoveries made in the areas of Pathology and Anatomy. Relying upon pathological dissections conducted on donated corpses, precious tissue samples are collected to be closely and meticulously scrutinized under the microscope for revealing clues and irrefutable answers. Again and again, findings from dissection have led to major turning points in disease research, which subsequently help bring about proper diagnosis and correct treatment. Indeed, at the Hualian Tzu Chi Hospital, there had been many occasions where the dissection report of one deceased patient led to the last

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minute rescue of another patient with similar symptoms. This is a bond between life and death and an example of love amongst humanity.

As for organ donation, it is a decision of great courage and great wisdom in the challenge of confronting life's unpredictability. It is indeed an important link in "transforming the unutilized into the greatly utilized", as it serves to prolong the true longevity and the moral lifespan of the donated organs. While I was the superintendent of the Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, I witnessed high rates of recovery in kidney transplants, as well as successful cases of the extremely complicated liver transplant. In 2003, Dalin Hospital discharged Achen, its very first recipient of a transplanted liver. It has been six years now, and Achen is grown up and raising a family, with two precious children of his own. The great courage and great giving of the donor family not only saved a young life, but extended further into creating a household. This is how life reaches out and carries on endlessly; this is one ideal snapshot of transforming the unutilized into the greatly utilized.

I am grateful to all the Bodhisattvas who made the greatest of contributions, whether it be the sharing their remains for medical research or donating their organs for saving another person. Furthermore, I extend my gratitude to their inspiring families as well. I sincerely hope that all the participants in the Tzu Chi Medical Mission, with the guidance of these silent mentors, will work together to become role models for the global health care profession only to be emulated by medical students and young physicians alike. May we all reach new peaks in health care and in medical culture!

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