



Making a Difference

Patient-Centric Health Care

Text/Chien Sou-Hsin
Superintendent of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital

Crohn's disease, an immune related disease, is rare in Taiwan. It is an inflammatory response in the intestinal tract. When examining the colon of a Crohn's disease patient, the coarse nodular appearance along the mucosal lining is often medically described as cobblestone. The progression of the disease and the pain that accompanies can be excruciating for the patients.

The odd thing is, for some unknown reasons, the number of patients with Crohn's disease in Taiwan is gradually climbing.



As our medical professions are inexperienced with the disease, providing a comprehensive treatment has become a critical issue.

Crohn's disease is a chronic inflammatory diseases where the immune system attacks gastrointestinal tracts, directed at certain healthy cells by mistake. It is most commonly found in the ileocecal region, followed by the colon and the small intestine. Since the inflammation may span the entire depth of the gastrointestinal wall while the ulcerations and unaffected tissues interweave, the treatment for the disease can be challenging.

The treatment of Crohn's disease focuses on three aspects: treating the acute problems, maintain remission, and prevent relapse. The process for the treatment may be long and complex, and can be ineffective without detail explanation and planning from the doctors, and trust and cooperation from the patients. It is evident that medical treatment is a collaborative process that demands input from doctors and patients, and whether the doctors, and all medical professionals alike, can comprehend and implement patient-centric health care, is pivotal.

Let us take a look at Mayo Clinic. If you click on their official website, you will see a list of patient stories, detailing their combat, and setbacks, with



Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital set up a boccia team for cerebral palsy patients for rehabilitation and recreation.

illnesses. Mayo Clinic has elevated beyond the current trend of medical arms race. Instead they redirect their attention to communicating their patient centric ideals and practices to patients who have no prior knowledge of the institution. The website of Cleveland Clinic is designed based on patient-centricity. Their promotional video, "Empathy: The Human Connection to Patient Care", it slows down time of a hospital setting, and grants us, the medical professionals, a rare opportunity to catch a glimpse of patients and their stories.

There are few lines of texts at the end of the video, and it reads as followed:

If you can stand in someone else's shoes...

Hear what they hear.

See what they see.

Feel what they feel.

Would you treat them differently?

I was deeply moved. Medical professionals tend to grow numb to their surroundings when working in a face paced environment. If we could empathize with our patients, listen to their stories, we may approach them differently than we would otherwise, and the doctor-patient relationship in our society may not be as strained as it is now.

"Prescription for Excellence", a book that discusses the world top tier medical industry - UCLA health system. The author, Joseph Michelli, dissected and analyzed the key reasons to the industry's overall success, and composed his findings through a series of stories.

One of the stories is about a 17-year-old high school girl who suffers from acute myocarditis, complicated by influenza infection. The condition, followed by thrombus formation, soon escalated to vertebral artery thrombosis, the partial or complete occlusion of vertebral artery, which resulted in paralysis. The sudden news posed a great burden on the teenager. The nurses, realizing that the girl was about to graduate from high school, planned to set up a small graduation ceremony, and the prom all high schoolers look forward to, in the hospital just for her. All her friends, families, classmates attended her graduation.

The girl soon passed away. When her mother returned to the hospital to sign some papers, she burst into tears the moment she saw the familiar faces - the nurses who attended to her daughter. The graduation party is the best present to her little girl before she passed away, the mother said.

When confronting the predicaments in life, we may not always be able to change its outcome, but sometimes, we can change the lives involved. The key is to understand what patients and families need. I believe the hospital in the story has provided a direction.

I believe, if the world is to elect the most beautiful hospital around the globe, Taichung Tzu Chi General Hospital would definitely be in the top tier. I cannot guarantee we would come first, but definitely in the top ten. Our architectural design, humanistic culture, patient-centric health care, and empathetic medical staff have set a high standard for our peers. We have challenged the long standing paradigm of clinic-centric practice, and replaced it with patient-and-family-centric approach.

Who taught us to think outside the box, to conceptualize old issues innovatively? It was Master Cheng Yen. She empathizes the suffering in the world

as if it is her own. The severe flooding in Huadong in 1991, or the devastation of Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, Tzu Chi volunteers read the mind and compassion of Master Cheng Yen and immediately initiated comprehensive relief projects. When Tzu Chi medical professionals can empathize with Master Cheng Yen and apply that boundless compassion in their profession, that is what we call genuine human-centric practice.



Superintendent Chien Sou-Hsin with medical team members paid a home visit to treat a charity recipient.