



NURSING SPIRITS SHINE IN THE CARE OF THE **BURN PATIENTS**

Hsieh Mei-Lin, Assistant Professor, Nursing Dept., Tzu Chi University
Peng Tai-Chu, Professor, Nursing Dept., Tzu Chi University

The ninth day after the dust explosion accident, I departed from Hualien and arrived at the Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital. I am committed to attend to the burn victims simply because I am a teacher of nursing whose job is primarily to train new medical nurses. A lot of experienced care is needed for the front line nurses, and many medical staff throughout the country participated in the disaster relief and patients' care.

Whatever I Can Help

In the beginning, I was worried if my presence would cause inconvenience to the hospital. But when I thought of the disaster, I knew I would be valuable as long as I am willing to serve others.

After arriving at the hospital, Liao Ru-Wen, Vice Nursing Director took us to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). As soon as Head Nurse Kang Fang-Yu introduced us to the environment and patients, Yu-Wu, a student of mine, a Tzu Chi University graduate, came to greet us.

“Teacher, I was about to start the treatment but was told that you are here so I came over. I am deeply touched to see you here!” Tears were rolling down her cheek before she completed the sentence. For the past week, the front line staff did their best to save patients and to minimize casualties. It was the first time for many of the staff to attend burned victims. Under tremendous pressure, they didn’t have time to vent their emotion for which I feel really sorry. ICU Nurse Han Xian, a graduate from our department, spoke of that day when every hospital staff was mobilized for the emergency.



Burn patients are rarely seen in the hospital; therefore many staff personnel have limited experience in that aspect. However, several experienced nurses of the Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital unexpectedly arrived in Taipei to join the rescue effort. Under the leadership of Director Chang Shu-Chuan of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, several former nurses also returned to collaborate with the caring teammates.

Sharing Experiences in Attending Burned Patients

Nurse Wang To-Jung of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital had years of experiences in treating burn patients. Collecting and sorting her patients' relevant data based on the size and severity of the burned areas, she joined the medical team to discuss the most appropriate way of nursing in this situation. She not only undertook the role of being a team leader changing dressings for patients but also provided guidance for the front line nurses how to look after patients. During the shift-changing periods, she held daily meeting with team members to discuss the progress of his/her wounds case by case and reminded them of the do's and don'ts while changing dressings. At the end, she would review its process and looked for room to be improved. Whatever issues in



question exist would be clarified on the spot. In addition, Ms. Wang also instructed them the correct usage of isolated gear, some precautions of sterility, along with customized Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) card of changing bandages for other colleagues' reference.

Through this disaster, I saw the selfless professionalism while a senior alumna was leading her alumni in caring the injured. The SOP had been updated through many discussions so that the primary care nurses could master the patient's care, be in charge of changing dressings, and observe each patient's wounds and progress. What was more important was to implement the concept of sterility to prevent wound infections caused by human factor. In spite of the venues of the Tzu chi hospitals, I am very impressed by how Tzu Chi's colleagues were held together.

Determined Will and Nursing Care

In the surrounding area of the Burn Unit, the medical staff in isolated gear was busy shuttling back and forth in the hallway; some of the wounded wrapped with surgical dressings and green sterile sheets could hardly be recognized due to their swollen faces. Upon hearing the painful groaning of her patient, a nurse continually comforted him, "I'm sorry, I know you are in pain. It will be over soon, please be patient." In the past, one of my burned patients once told me that the dressing change is comparable to "an execution of capital punishment", because most patients were conscious while going through the process. Even with the injection of painkiller, it did not completely rid patients the sense of painfulness. Therefore, some patients were scared at the thought of dressings' change, which even sent a shudder of fear through their whole bodies. When it was the second turn of the day to change dressings, it required the medical team cooperation, ranging from preparing the medication and accessories, unpicking wounds, helping patients elevate their limbs, spreading out sterile sheets, cleansing wounds, applying ointment, covering them with surgical dressings, rolling them over, etc. It took at least three to four staff members to complete the procedure. The medication, medical equipment and appliances, surgical gowns and bed sheets made considerable demand on its expenditures. Changing dressings starts at the beginning of morning shift, and till past lunch time by the time when all is done. In addition to dressings' change, nurses had to perform their regular duties including dispensing medicines. Everyone was so tied up with their

assignments that it was difficult for them to find time to use the bathroom or take a lunch break. Day-shift colleagues start their duty at seven am in the morning till eight or nine pm in the evening. Afterwards, colleagues get together eating their cold lunch boxes and discussing on how to improve their services.

Cheering for Patients

During those days, in addition to changing dressings, replenishing medical equipment and appliances, and preparing for the demand of sterile gloves and sterile bandages, we also provided psychological support at bedside to the wounded. Shau-Tzu (a pseudonym), aged 18, a nursing student, impressed me the most among all. After completing the internship, she and other students participated in this event. She recalled at the time of the accident scene, "It was approaching ten o'clock in the evening; the event was coming to an end, it was dark everywhere. All of a sudden, I saw sparks in a distance and I assumed they were special effects specially arranged by the organizer; until someone began to shout. I then realized that something bad had gone wrong. I ran away from the fire scene. It was so crowded that I could not run but squatted on the ground. Later on, I was carried to a place nearby water. At that time, I felt as if my feet had been trampling on the burnt ashes. I had to run for life. Screaming and crying continuously, a lot of people jostled, ran down or fell on the sizzling ground. A thought flashed through my mind, 'This is it, what will happen to my mother?'" She added, "The local residents and the uninjured came to offer me their assistance which warmed my heart. I was still in shock upon arrival at the hospital. I lost my bag and phone; fortunately, someone helped me contact my parents." Shau-Tzu mentioned she was thirsty. Before she fell into sleep, she drank some water with assistance. After leaving her room, I could not help but constantly recall my conversation with her. The discomforting feeling of my aching heart was beyond description which did not dissipate for quite a while.

We Are Proud of Our Students

For the last few days in the hospital in Taipei, I came across many graduated students whom I had taught. They all took the initiative to greet me which touched my heart. Seeing my students' outstanding performance in clinical care, I am honored to be their teacher as well. Nevertheless, nursing students have to study a lot from fundamental to advanced nursing, which testifies the teachers' capabilities in professional theories



combined with the clinical practices. Moreover, it is essential that every registered nurse be capable of caring for patients under the umbrella of nursing science. The teachers thus play an important role in enlightening nursing education.

Being involved in this caring experience, I realize the importance of nursing technology and theoretical teaching. It reflects how well the nursing staffs are educated from setting up the sterile ward, putting on and removing sterile isolated gears, abiding by the rules of changing dressings, and binding up bandages. Nursing staffs can be adept in various techniques as long as the technical operations of sterility are followed thoroughly in face of different types of injuries.

Burn patients will be facing the lengthy process of medical and rehabilitation treatments in the future. The greatest strength for them to overcome the obstacles depends on the encouragement of family members, relatives and friends. Our mission and responsibilities are to provide the best first line nursing care team and company. Let's keep it up!