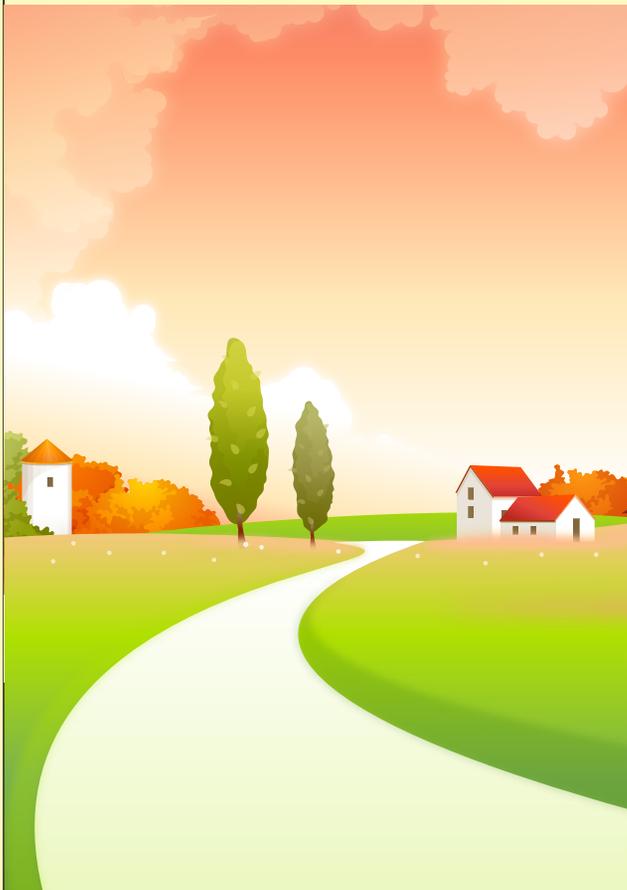


# Befriend My Illness



*When a chronic disease descends upon a nurse,  
How does she walk past the dark cloud?  
And combat the disease with courage?  
The disease is a turning point,  
That reveals her devotion in nursing.*

*At the prime of her life,  
She was chosen to live with this incurable disease.  
Frustration, hopelessness and shock  
Blindfolded her and tested her will.  
In the end, she came to peace with her health,  
And found the direction and meaning of life.*

*Disease, like a long journey, is a battle against endurance.  
It tests one's attitude towards life,  
And ability to cope with pain.  
It teaches the lesson of impermanence;  
And strengthens her love and compassion in nursing.*

*She endures pain and prevails over lamentation.  
No longer thinks of herself as a patient,  
But as a nurse who knows how patients feel.*

# Passion for Nursing

Written by Chun-Hsiu Huang, Intensive Unit Nurse, Taipei Tzu Chi General Hospital

**T**he *First Intimate Contact* is one of the novels that took fame on the internet. At the end of the novel, the book's ailing heroine's final outcome is inevitably death. I too am afflicted by a kidney disease. Before I received treatment, I often wondered when I can end my struggle. But I was very fortunate. Although I have to endure a life-long discomfort and medication, I was able to avert death.

My mother's illness led me to Tzu Chi.

I was born in Kaohsiung and was an accountant for many years. I aspired to become a nurse after my mother fell ill. I passed the nursing school entrance exam and was admitted to Junior Nursing College. In my Introduction to Nursing Administration class, Superintendent Pei-Jung told our class many lovely and touching stories from Tzu Chi Hospital. I was inspired to become a member of the Tzu Chi medical team and to work in Tzu Chi's intensive care unit.

Two years ago, I finally became a nurse in Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital. The first day on



The Intensive Care unit of Taipei Tzu Chi General Hospital is one great place to work. Colleagues pitched-in when Nurse Chun-Hsiu Huang was sick. This is one of the main reasons why Huang likes her job so much.

the job was a dream came true. I had a completely different view of life. I was no longer thinking "When can I be relieved of my illness?" Instead, I was thinking, "How can I serve more people?"

After joining Tzu Chi family I worked earnestly every day. I wanted to live my life

to the fullest without regret. I was too busy and therefore neglected my own health. I was unaware of it until my body gave me a dire warning.

Because I live in Taipei alone, so senior nurses in my department often stayed with me after work and accompanied me to the Emergency Room. They comforted me until my medical condition became stable, and then drove me home. Although I can only verbally express my gratitude, their warmth is always in my heart. I am forever indebted to them.

Before I became a nurse, I was passive about my illness. In my heart, I told the disease, "This is cruel. Why me? I can't fight it, so I'll just give up." So I pretended that I was not sick; I did not see doctors, and paid no attention to my prognosis. It was after that I had started working at the surgical intensive care at the Tzu Chi Hospital, I learned to cherish life and love my own life. Under the encouragement of senior nurses in the department, I finally started to have medical treatment about my kidney disease.

### **Kidney dialysis – a nurse and a patient**

However, fate seems to enjoy making fun of me. My health was deteriorating to a point where I could not live normally. Dr Sai-Chun Hung kept urging to undergo kidney dialysis. However, I was adamant and refused.

The reason I rejected kidney dialysis treatment was the fear of losing my job and the privilege to serve patients in the ICU. Those 700 days serving in the unit were the happiest, the most productive, and the most meaningful days in my life. I did not want to be separated from my coworkers and deprive myself the opportunity to care for patients.

So I began to neglect visits to the doctors. I had no courage to face the truth. Dr. Hung assembled a group of people to persuade me to accept medical treatment. The director of nursing, Tzu Chi volunteers and my supervisors were all in this group. My heart was up and down, and I cried quietly at night. I was too scared. I could not make up my mind. My supervisors never gave up but teamed with more experts from experienced medical professions. Finally, Dr. Chou-Chin Lan spent some time with me and cleared my last hurdle. He assured me that I would be able to continue my nursing tasks while I am on the dialysis program. I decided to go for the procedure and face the discomfort and inconvenience.

In order to have kidney dialysis, I had to have a surgery to implant the tubing. I started to research about kidney dialysis. Once I had a better understanding of the procedures, I accepted the treatment program. But it didn't mean that I like it.

## Thank all people around me for their support

During my absence, I was gratified that Yi-Hsuan Chen, director of nursing, visited me often while I stayed in the hospital. She even called me at home after I was discharged from the hospital. It really touched me. I wanted to thank my department senior nurses for helping and supporting me. With their help and encouragement, I could rest comfortably without worries. Besides my colleagues, my sister also came and accompanied me. I was deeply touched by our familial love and bonding.

As I learn more about Tzu Chi, I grow more attached to Intensive Care unit. I regretted for not going to nursing college earlier. Now that I am working at the Tzu Chi Hospital, a lot of people care about me. I am looking forward to recovery so I can serve more people. I want to continue to care for patients until the day I reunite with my mother in heaven.

Now I say to my disease, "I want to have more time to make use of my energy and serve patients. Please give me time to love the people around me and allow me do my job. I have more beautiful things to do here."



Nursing department supervisors, volunteers, and Dr. Chou-Chin Lan (middle) are visiting Chun-Xiu while she is recovering from a surgery.

# The Power of Positive Thought

Yi-Chun Chen, Outpatient Registered Nurse, Taipei Tzu Chi General Hospital

**I**n 2003, in the midst of the world's SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) scare, my grandfather was hospitalized with a stroke. When I went to see him, I was immediately quarantined because of a fever. After a series of tests, they ruled out SARS and I was happy to be finally released from isolation. I was so ecstatic that I disregarded the doctor's advice to have follow-up lab tests due to my higher than normal white blood count. It was not until later, when I went to the Taipei Mackay Memorial Hospital Pulmonary Department for a check up, and they referred me to the Oncology Department for further testing. It was then I finally realized the seriousness of the matter.

## Turning point to study nursing

The test results confirmed that I had acute lymphoma, the so-called blood cancer. I was only 17 years old. With no chance to escape and no alternatives, I immediately began chemotherapy

treatments. Despite the side effect of massive hair loss, everything seemed to progress well. However, near the end of the treatment, something went horribly wrong. For unknown reasons, a perforation started to develop in my small intestine and the inflammation of the lining eventually induced septicemia. I was unconscious for three days. When I next opened my eyes, I had undergone two operations, and countless IV, tubing and medical devices were connected me. The medical equipment around me became my life-support necessities. During the following days in the intensive care unit, it seemed that I suffered every possible pain and every form of hopelessness a patient could experience. The use of the respirator meant that my communication to the world was downgraded to only writing. Going from an active youngster to a bedridden patient, I was engulfed with a sense of helplessness when morphine could not ease my pain.

If there had been no SARS epidemic,

I would not have found out about my own illness. Without my illness, I would not have been so determined to continue my career in nursing. Before my illness, I was a nursing student, but after I was diagnosed with lymphoma, my parents suggested that I pick another major that was less demanding. However, the help and encouragement I received from medical personnel served to solidify my decision to become a nurse to help others in need.

I felt the endless and unconditional love from family and friends during my illness. I was exposed to various religions but the Tzu Chi Foundation left me the most profound impression. Sister Ching Yuan, a Tzu Chi volunteer who was working in Taipei at the time, came to visit me after

work every day. On Mid-Autumn Festival day, she brought me moon cakes, pomelo and a card for the holiday. Her sincerity and selfless support inspired me to become a volunteer myself. When I went back to school after my cancer had gone into remission, I organized a Tzu Chi Youth Group on campus and invited friends to join. I participated in numerous Tzu Chi activities and learned many values and much life philosophy.

### **A dream come true - Working at the Tzu Chi outpatient clinic**

For my first job, I chose to work with the Tzu Chi medical team because it allowed me to use my profession to help others.



After a detour, Yi-Chun Chen decided to return to nursing and work in an outpatient clinic. She has met all walks of life on the job and has learned a great deal to help her grow.

Because of my life-threatening experience, I wanted to work with critically ill patients in remote areas. After graduation, I went to work in the general surgery department of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital. During that time, I was able to establish good relationships with patients. However, the three shifts per day arrangement was too physically demanding, so I returned to Taipei to work in the outpatient unit of the Tzu Chi hospital.

I was tremendously busy in the outpatient clinic and felt it was hard to follow Dharma Master Cheng Yen's teachings. I realized that to "Try to get along with all kinds of people", and to try to be easygoing in such a stressful environment is not so simple. Although my original dream of working at an ICU unit cannot be fulfilled, I am happy in the outpatient unit because all of my colleagues are helpful and considerate, just like a family.

### **Cancer recurrence**

During an ultrasound test last August, a large amount of fluid was discovered in my abdomen. I was in such shock and could not pacify my emotion. A special team was called to discuss my treatment strategy. My supervisor scheduled an easier work shift, and colleagues took time off from work to accompany me to various lab tests. Their company and

hugs brought me comfort. They used their vacation hours to cover my shifts. They also stayed in the hospital at night to keep me company.

My cancer has taught me, we cannot choose the length of our lives, but we can manage how we live. I want to live my life with the width, broadness, depth and substantial meaning. Before my illness, I liked to argue about right or wrong, and I cared about winning and losing. After my illness, I am much more considerate because I can feel patients' pain, loneliness, fear and hopelessness.

Now I learn to understand and forgive, to speak softly, and not to compare nor hold grudges against others. This reminded me of Master Cheng Yen's saying: "A moment of ignorance leads to karmic affinity of all evils; the thought of a pure deed can bring blessings and increase wisdom"

A Tzu Chi volunteer once said: "Yi-Chun is strong, but she is only 25. She should not be that strong."

I think she was expressing her sympathy, and I am thankful. Everyone around me is my mentor who supports me and guides me. Whether they are family, friends or just acquaintances, they have all given me countless good wishes. After going through this life-and-death experience, I learned how to cope with challenges and use the power of positive thinking to overcome obstacles in life.