





To Cultivate the Indigenous Health Guardians

The proportion of aboriginal patients is high in Hualien-Taitung region,
so are the aboriginal nurses among our colleagues.

The unobstructed communication raises the quality of multi-cultural services.

The optimistic, vibrant traits of the aboriginals,
when introduced into the practice of nursing,
invigorated the positive energy of the workplace!

Tzu Chi College of Technology, situated in Hualien,
has established an aboriginal nursing course ever since it was founded.

The college offers full tuition and monthly allowance
to attract aboriginal youth nationwide joining health care services.

The retraining of the clinical on-the-job classes
has trained excellent aboriginal nurses one after another,
to proudly become the guardians of their tribes.



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When we speak of Taiwanese aboriginals, the first thought that pops in mind for most people is probably the names of celebrities and singers, or defined facial features, excellent physical abilities and enchanting voices. Unbeknownst to them, the aboriginals are a formidable force in the field of nursing.

Taiwanese aboriginals occupy 2.2% of the nation's population, which is roughly translated to 530,000 people, and among them 52.9% are highland aboriginals. Although the mountainous aboriginals are a minority, their centralized settlements occupy 44% of Taiwan's land area. With sparse population, scarce resources and inconvenient transportation, these areas have always been deprived of medical resources. The aboriginals in Hualien County occupy 27.1% of the overall population, while Taitung County is 35.1%. In other words, approximately one-third of the nation's aboriginals are located in Hualien-Taitung region. This is precisely the reason behind the founding of Hualien, Yuli and Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospitals - to safeguard the health of Hua-Tung Rift Valley residents.

Tzu Chi College of Technology, situated in Hualien City, has always being a cradle to the nursing professionals of Hualien-Taitung ever since its founding two decades ago. In 1996, the college established a five-year nursing program for aboriginals, coupled with public funding, to attract aboriginal students nationwide to join the ranks of nursing professionals. Whether it

is through the training of aboriginal nursing professionals or the retraining of clinical on-the-job classes, the graduates from our college are the primary health care providers of Hualien-Taitung region.

The college has founded an aboriginal museum to introduce the distinctive cultural characteristics of each tribe, as well as a division of aboriginal student affair to assist our students. In this article, we conducted survey to comprehend the strengths of our aboriginal nursing professionals and the effectiveness of health care in remote regions.

High Proportion of Aboriginal Nurses and Patients

The survey consisted of 1,251 effective valid questionnaires. It was aimed to analyze cognitive differences between aboriginal nurses and non-aboriginal nurses, so the subjects were divided into aboriginals and non-aboriginals. There were 107 aboriginal nurses, 8.6% of the total nurses, and 1,144 non-aboriginal nurses, 91.7% of the total nurses. Since 8.6% of the nurses from all six Tzu Chi Hospitals are aboriginal, Considering that the aboriginals only represent 2.2% of the total population, the proportion of aboriginals working in nursing profession is relatively high.

The first question aimed to understand the frequency of nursing aboriginal patients in all six Tzu Chi Hospitals. For the non-aboriginal nurses, 19.8% reported daily, 30.6% reported only few a month, 40.3%

Basic Statistics

Gender	Number of People	%
Male	34	2.4
Female	1,372	97.6
Total	1,406	100.0
Age	Number of People	%
Under 20	32	2.3
21~25	371	26.4
26~30	335	23.8
31~35	313	22.3
36~40	196	13.9
Above 40	159	11.3
Total	1,406	100.0
Nursing Level	Number of People	%
N	431	30.7
N1	331	23.5
N2	441	31.4
N3	131	9.3
N4	72	5.1
Total	1,406	100.0
Job Title	Number of People	%
Registered nurse/nurse	1,072	76.2
Deputy head nurse	48	3.4
Head nurse or higher	109	7.8
Functional unit	56	4.0
Nurse practitioner	121	8.6
Total	1,406	100.0

reported once a month or longer; for the aboriginal nurses, as high as 50.5% reported daily, 21.5% reported weekly, 16.8% reported few a month, and 11.2% reported once a month or longer. In terms of ratio, more than half of the aboriginal nurses attend to aboriginal patients on daily basis. It is possible that these aboriginal nurses are distributed in Hualien, Yuli and

Kuanshan Tzu Chi Hospitals where the frequency of aboriginal patients visiting are higher.

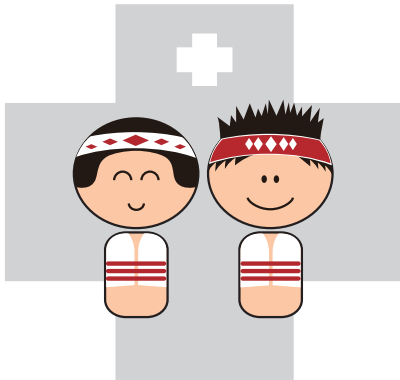
Nurse Aboriginals by Aboriginals

The aboriginals have always been perceived as optimistic and agreeable. The survey indicated that 66.5% considered the



Q1

The frequency I took care of aboriginal patients?



	non-aboriginal nurses (N = 1,144)	aboriginal nurses (N = 107)
Everyday	19.8%	50.5%
Every week	9.3%	21.5%
Some time in a month	30.6%	16.8%
Some time in longer than a month	40.3%	11.2%

aboriginal nurses as positive and vibrant, 60.3% considered them as humorous, and more than 40% regarded them as casual and easygoing, which can enliven the work atmosphere. Their positive traits tend to loosen the tense and stern atmosphere in the workplace and reduce the pressure of the nurses.

The survey also indicated that 91.1% of the non-aboriginal nurses, from their clinical experiences, agreed or strongly agreed that working with aboriginal nurses benefitted them in satisfying the patients' nursing needs through their aboriginal cultural perspectives. Furthermore, all participating aboriginal nurses agreed or strongly agreed that they can assist their nursing colleagues in clinical work by providing the patients' needs through the aboriginal cultural perspective. It is apparent that the nursing role of these aboriginal nurses in cultural adaptability is

not only recognized by themselves but also by all nurses.

Advantages in Cross-Cultural Communication

What are the advantages of aboriginal nurses when nursing aboriginal patients? More than half of the non-aboriginal nurses, from their work experience, believe that it is easier for aboriginal nurses to establish a positive nurse-patient relationship and to communicate with aboriginal patients. For the non-aboriginal nurses, 43.2% believed that it is easier for aboriginal nurses to earn the trust of aboriginal patients, while 24.5% believed that aboriginal nurses can better understand the difficulty and challenges of aboriginal patients. As for aboriginal nurses, 71% believed that they have an easier time establishing a positive nurse-patient relationship with patients, and more than

50% believed that they can communicate and empathize with the patient better as well as earning their trust.

Entering Tribes with Aboriginal Nurses

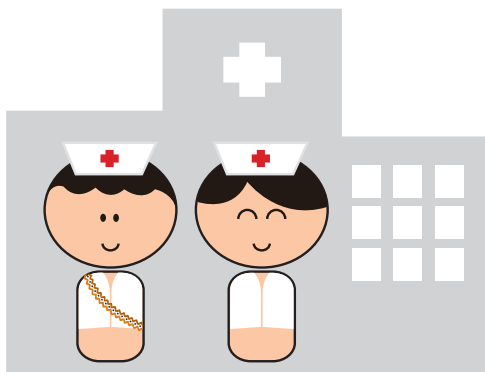
There are plenty of outstanding aboriginal nurses who are devoted to the health care of their tribespeople, who are also the guides who lead their colleagues to cross cultural barriers. Head Nurse Ya-Chun Chen of pediatric ward, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, is a lady from the Payuan Tribe who graduated from Tzu Chi College of Technology. She, once a pediatric oncology nurse practitioner, accompanied countless children and their family through

the hardship of treatments and is dedicated to passing the torch to the younger generation.

Ya-Chun's aboriginal status contributed to the establishment of positive nurse-patient relationship with aboriginal patients and their family. She can earn their trust and be accepted as one of them with relative ease. One time a sudden thought prompted her to call an aboriginal youth who was treated for leukemia, only to discover that he was suffering from a severe lung infection. His dying voice alerted her, and she immediately hopped onto her motorcycle, and took the boy back to the hospital for treatment. The boy, ultimately succumbed to the disease, held her hand with all his strength before life faded away.

Q2

For the non-aboriginals, what are the attributes of your aboriginal nursing colleague(s)?
(N = 1,144, multiple choice)



Humorous and fun 60.3%

Vigorous and broad-minded 66.5%

Easygoing 42.1%

Bring energy to workplace 23.6%

Active in participating group events 19.7%

Optimistic 35.9%

Worry-free 19.9%

Not bother about trifles 41.1%



Many of the aboriginal children who were ill came from broken families and lack parental care. Ya-Chun, with her aboriginal status, established an intimate nurse-patient relationship with these children. Her enthusiasm also motivated her colleagues as well. Whenever she visit the disadvantaged families she met in the hospital or kindergartens in remote regions, her colleagues would always join her with equal enthusiasm.

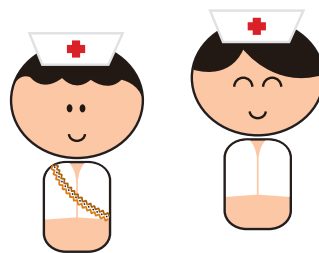
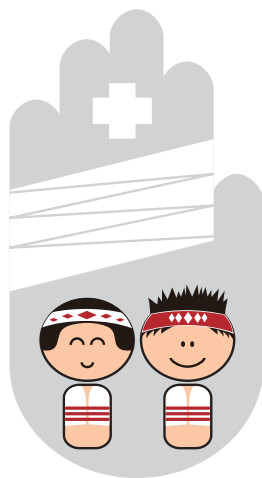
With her profound knowledge of the aboriginal tribe and its culture, Ya-Chun often acts as a bridge between the aboriginals and the non-aboriginals. Few years ago I-Jung, the assistant head nurse of the pediatric ward, was nursing

an aboriginal elderly who underwent chemotherapy for colon cancer and was hospitalized for diarrhea. The cause of the diarrhea was eating raw feces of flying squirrels, a bizarre reason beyond I-Jung's comprehension. "The flying squirrels feed on sprouts, so their feces are filled with rich fibers and nutrients. In this elder's tribe, they view it as a great source of nutrition," Ya-Chun explained.

A lady in her seventies, not fluent in Mandarin, was hospitalized for tuberculosis. After taking the medication, her urine turned red. "I am becoming a woman again", "My period is coming back", the lady informed I-Jung anxiously. I-Jung attempted to explain to her it was the medication, but

Q3

In my clinical practice, aboriginal nurses could assist me in providing care considering cultural differences?

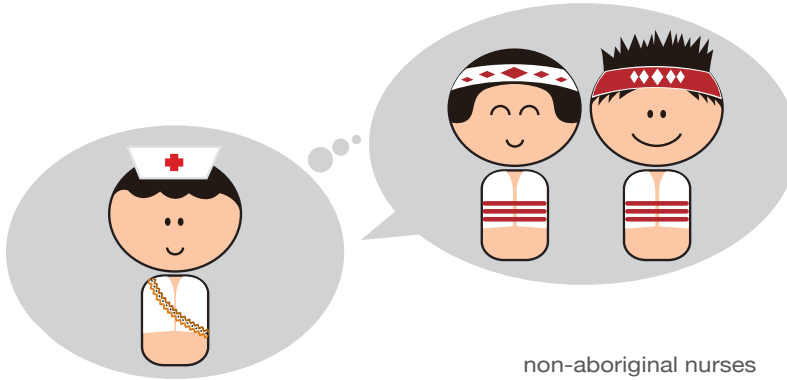


non-aboriginal nurses (N = 1,144) aboriginal nurses (N = 107)

Very much agree	13.9%	34.6%
Agree	77.2%	57.9%
Not agree	7.7%	7.5%
Not agree very much	1.2%	0.0%

Q4

In my clinical practice, aboriginal nursing colleagues would take better care of aboriginal patient(s) in what way(s)? (multiple choice)



	non-aboriginal nurses (N = 1,144)	aboriginal nurses (N = 107)
To build a relationship with patients	51.6%	71.0%
To communicate with patients	51.1%	59.8%
To understand the difficulty of patients	24.5%	52.3%
To gain patients trust	43.2%	53.3%
Not much difference	26.3%	25.2%

the language barrier prohibited her from doing so. Fortunately, Ya-Chun was there to assist and comfort the lady.

Nursing profession has always places strong emphasis on nursing care with cultural adaptability, to observe and identify the patients' physical, psychological and spiritual needs from their cultural context. The cultural differences between the aboriginals and the Han have presented countless challenges. From the health care perspective, by enlisting the aboriginal nurses, not only does the nursing quality raised substantially, they act as a bridge

between non-aboriginal nurses and the aboriginal patients and family, and hence be able to provide appropriate care to truly satisfy the needs of the patients.

Safeguard the Health of Tribespeople

The survey revealed that both non-aboriginal nurses (94.2%, 1,078 nurses) and aboriginal nurses (98.2%, 105 nurses) either agree or strongly agree that aboriginal nurses are vital in the medical care of aboriginals in the rural areas.



The training of nursing professionals, however, requires specialized nursing education and courses that are available only in colleges and universities. In the eyes of the relatively disadvantaged aboriginal students, the competition for annual admission is overwhelming. Since Hualien-Taitung region has long suffered the scarcity and high turnover of medical professionals, it has been the mission of Tzu Chi College of Technology to train local nurses dedicated to local health care. The college has, ever since the implementation of aboriginal nursing program in 1996, trained thirteen classes of aboriginal graduates. The survey indicated that, amongst the non-aboriginal nurses, only 51.7% knew about the

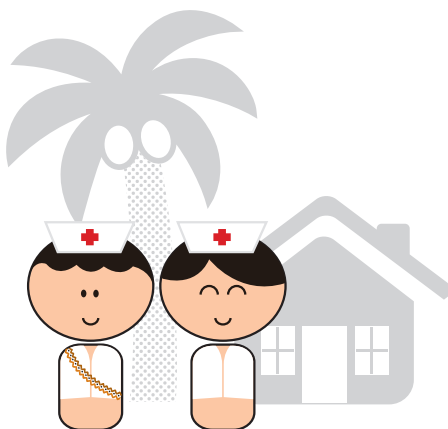
aboriginal nursing course offered by the college, while 72% of the aboriginal nurses have that knowledge. However, 28% of the aboriginal nurses were unaware of the information. Without a doubt, there is still room for improvement.

The college's bursary for the aboriginal nursing course include five years of tuition, lodging, meals, uniform, textbooks, and TWD 3,000 to 5,000 allowance money. Furthermore, the students are immediately employed by the Tzu Chi Hospitals upon graduation. For these economically disadvantaged students, the course easily satisfies the need for education and employment.

Hsiao-Shu is a graduate student from the program last year. If without the

Q5

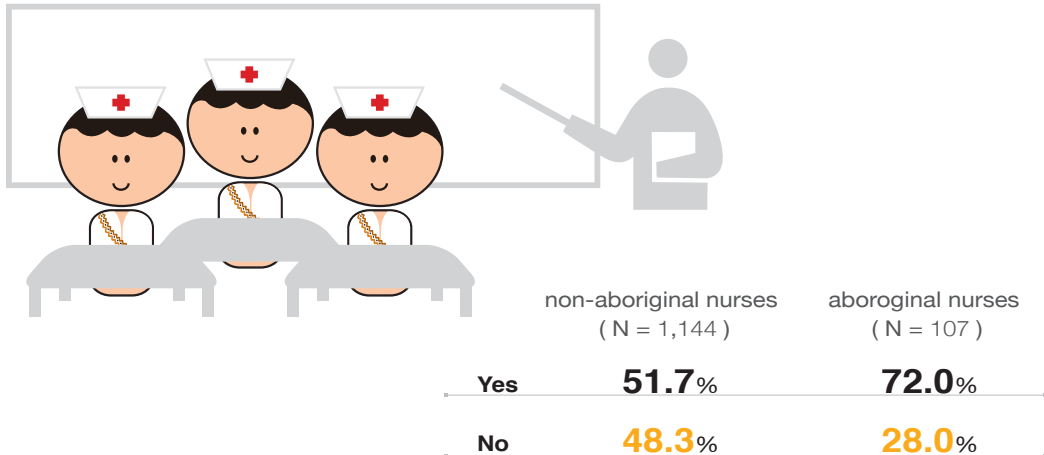
I think aboriginal nursing staff are important for health care in remote areas (mountain tribes)?



	non-aboriginal nurses (N = 1,144)	aboriginal nurses (N = 107)
Very much agree	24.2%	58.9%
Agree	70.0%	39.3%
Not agree	5.3%	0.9%
Not agree very much	0.4%	0.9%

Q6

When I encounter a problem, a doubt, or stress, it could be solved if I expressed out? (N = 1,406)



bursary from the college, she would not have afforded to complete her study at the vocational school with her family's economic conditions. Now she is currently enrolled in our college, preparing to head straight into clinical work upon graduation to fully utilize the knowledge she acquired.

Additionally, the on-the-job classes in our continual education program are the best opportunity for the local workforce. Ching-Huan, an Amis girl, is a 2nd year working student in our continuing education program. She volunteered all the night shifts to make time to study. When last semester's class on women's health explored the issue of domestic violence, Ching-Huan felt that domestic violence is an ongoing problem in her tribe, and some of her nursing colleagues suffered from it.

In most occasions, they as children could only be a bystander, since the tribal rules dictate that they could not interfere. Under the guidance of her teacher Shu-Fang, Ching-Huan analyzed in depth the issue of domestic violence and conducted on-site case study. She is determined to voice out for the tribal ladies to safeguard their well-being.

Tzu Chi College of Technology, a cradle for guardian angels that protect the rural areas, offers concrete results on the improvement to the quantity and quality of rural health care professionals through both its vocational school and technical college. We hope to recruit more aboriginal students into our family, join hand in hand as nursing professionals to safeguard the health of the aboriginals.