

Lingzhi Mushroom Girl

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“She is such a beautiful child with a lovely smile!

“Children should be carefree but now even a little cold can limit her mobility.

“We have hidden all the mirrors in our house so she can’t see them.”

This was the story told by a troubled indigenous mother holding a picture of her daughter.

Heart in Dismay, but Not Frightened by Wounds

It was hard to imagine the little girl dancing in the picture was the same person lying on the hospital bed. What we saw in front of us was a 12-year-old girl who suffered from limb necrosis and speech degradation due to infections in her brain. She was only left with her upper arms; her lower extremities were dark and dried from necrosis, just like a dehydrated Lingzhi (A Chinese mushroom that has been used in herbal medicine) mushroom. Since ancient time, Lingzhi mushroom has long been considered a symbol of auspiciousness, prosperity and longevity. To give her blessings, we nicknamed her “Lingzhi Mushroom Girl.”

She had sharp big eyes, like staring at visitors without a hint of smile on her pale face. If anyone came close to her, including her parents, she would wave what was left of her limbs in frustration, then started crying. Her mom always said in tears, “Our hearts are so tormented seeing her like this.”

“Hearts in dismay”, was what everyone who cared for the Lingzhi Mushroom Girl felt. Her mom was aware of the severity of her daughter’s wounds so she always forewarned the nursing staff before they changed her dressings.

“She has big open wounds, some with visible bones, some are festered, and some turned dark. Please don’t get scared,” said her mother.

It was inspiring that all the nursing staff never flinched or backed down. Instead, they all volunteered to help to care for her, even nurses from other hospital beds.

With Loving Hearts, Reduces Pain and Eliminates Tears

The little girl needed dressing change between shifts. It required four nurses for the task. Normally, there were only four nurses per shift. Special scheduling was made so that a total of eight nurses could stand-by to assist. Everyone helped her bathe, change gowns and to weigh her. Once they developed the routine, they were able to reduce the time from 1.5 hours to merely 20 minutes. Teamwork helped reducing the girl’s pain and discomfort.

When nurses noticed the difficulty of gown changes in her case, they requested special tailored gowns, six colorful gowns hand-made by Tzu Chi volunteers so that it can be open at the shoulder area from top and bottom, facilitating the disrobe effort and reducing her pain from dismounting and mounting. Although the process was distressing, everyone treated her with love and the power of collaboration surpassed the fear of the wounds.

“Come help me place the sterile side upward, you help distract her, stand here and talk to her...”

Comforting the Lingzhi Mushroom Girl became the most important task. With her degraded speech, she hit and screamed to express her pain and discomfort. Many nurses





comforted her while taking her punches. They spoke softly, “That is okay, I know she is very uncomfortable,” to respond to her mother’s embarrassment. After many days of specialized care, Lingzhi Mushroom Girl was slowly turning around. She was able to stay calm and even squeeze in a little smile every now and then.

Loving Effort Touched Others and Delight Hearts

Wound healing from infection involved a long stay at the hospital. To help Lingzhi Mushroom Girl adjust to the hospital life, the nursing staff tried everything from making jokes, putting on make-up, dressing her up, drawing, talking after hours, giving praise and story-telling, etc. Lingzhi Mushroom Girl was dressed neatly and cleanly daily. She sometimes responded with a smile, which was the most beautiful smile in the world, and the sweetest reward for the nurses.

Since the family of the Lingzhi Mushroom Girl lives in Taoyuan, they allowed her mother to spend nights at the hospital to lessen her homesickness and to prepare her mom for homecare training. During the time of her hospitalization, we listened to her mother’s concerns and frustration while we worried for the family. Soon, our daily greetings became a habit. Our hearts filled with proud achievement when her mother made a statement about her discharge. “You treated us like a real family,” said her mother, “How is it possible with people like you in the world? Thank you for all you have done!”

That was the touching part in nursing. None of us could change the Lingzhi Mushroom Girl’s past encounters but we hoped that we could be part her life in the future to support her.