

Take the Scars as a Mark to Restart a New Life

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After ER, all injured patients of the Formosa Fun Coast Explosion were admitted into the intensive care unit (ICU). It was the first time to treat such a large number of burnt patients at the Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, which at the time did not have a burnt trauma ICU. The ordeal of patients, their families, and the hospital personnel began at this moment.

Department's Immediate Need - Burnt Trauma Education

As a wound care nurse, I have been in contact with patients with wounds so deep that bones can be seen or rotten wounds with pungent stench. However,

when I saw a large number of open wounds resulted from burnt trauma and hearing the cries from patients with unbearable excruciating pain, I was scared. With wounds oozing secretion, blood, and a large amount of epidermis



peeling off, I was helpless to sooth their pain and address the immediate infectious problem because of the open wounds. However, I was grateful to be part of the Tzu Chi family. Two experienced burnt trauma ICU nurses from Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, Chen Wen-Chun and Wang To-Jung, came to assist us. In addition, many experienced nurses and personnel also arrived one after another. We mobilized our entire workforce to support the incident. At this very moment, other than feeling grateful, I am filled with utmost gratitude.

Established Dressing Unit, Implementing While Learning

With thirteen severely burnt patients requiring wound changes at least twice daily, each session varies as many as a few hours, we need a large number of burnt trauma medical personnel to work 12 to 16 hours daily to complete the difficult yet extensive delicate tasks.

For those medical personnel who lack the skills of helping burnt trauma, the work load is enormous and difficult. In order to provide care and alleviate the workload, a special dressing/wound care unit including staff from various departments is established. Personnel with little ICU or burnt trauma experience, including those who are on vacation, retired or students were called upon to support the dressing/wound care unit.

Everyone knew that Chen Wen-Chun and Wang To-Jung were only here for two weeks. We took the opportunities to learn during their wound care rounds, asking as many questions as we could. We also asked them to demonstrate bedside caring techniques. In a short period of time, the dressing/wound care unit was able to professionally provide adequate care independently in an organized

fashion to assess wounds care, allocate medication, and implement skin grafts and changes. For the unit to be able to handle all these patients, we must be thankful to Chen Wen-Chun and Wang To-Jung, their unselfish love and care for patients.

Agonizing Wound Care and Rehabilitation

Wound care for severely burnt patients was agonizing. Four to five medical personnel were needed to assist one patient. Despite the strong anesthesia, patient could hardly bear the pain and begged tearfully to stop the procedure, crying “help” or “let me die”. It was really hard for us to continue; however, it must be done or the risk of infection later. We could only halt and coerce the patients to cooperate: “We are almost done; just a few more seconds.” Every wound care moment to both patients and medical personnel was a long agonizing moment.

Patients always ask, “Why are the scars so ugly? Will it be the same as before? The scars feel like thousands of ants crawling. It itches so much that I cannot sleep! Why can’t I straighten or bend my hands and legs?” In addition to assuage their fears and remind them to tolerate, we coerce and sometime threaten them to participate in rehabilitation. With the arms or knees stiff, we plead with the patients to bear the pain and stretch some more. If patients don’t have the strength to stand, we massage their elbows or knees to soften the scars. When a patient is able to stand, the entire medical staff breaks out with joy and praises.





Live to Experience Selfless Love

When patients start complaining their sorrow, I say to them up close, “This is an opportunity to begin a new life. You learn to stand, walk, self-feed, and experience love. Every scar is a milestone for a new beginning. Enjoy life and experience life.” In addition to the selfless love from family members, medical personnel everywhere provide selfless love to all patients. One must be grateful to every medical staff that not only care for the patients, but feel for their suffering.

Such young lives are the survivors of the trauma. They survived each removal, cleansing, and skin graft, though rehabilitation is a long and arduous. In the months after the incident, every patient made significant progress and was discharged one after another. Even with our continuous care and love, their physical pain will assuage. However, their emotional recovery is long and albatross, albeit the support of their families. As a result, the medical staff is continuing to provide the heart-warm support to patients and families.