Experience
the
Reality

— a Discussion on the Enhancement of Clinical Nursing Profession Through Volunteer Service

Traveling around the world
is to experience volunteer service.
However, one doesn't need to travel far away,
because Tzu Chi in Taiwan provides the opportunities.

Volunteering is necessary for a Tzu Chi nurse.
Education and clinical experiences run parallel
and compliment each other.
How will this affect the development of the nursing profession?

Nursing is a profession designed to help people.
It is a science as well as an art;
the essence of nursing is to care for humanity.

A volunteer impacts world by starting with the self,
then reaches out to others in the society.

Seeing poverty and illness in real life,
one labors with great strength
in exchange for satisfaction and the spiritual self.

Patients and nurses seem to be closest in the clinical setting.
Altruism suddenly makes the whole process
easier and smoother.
When nurses feel burn out,
it is time to put on the volunteer vest...

Written by Yu-Chuan Lin, Associate Professor, Department of Nursing, Tzu Chi University

Volunteer service has become a distinguished school as well as a model in the twenty first century in Taiwan. The island is full of volunteers and their good deeds. What about the nurses? How willing are nurses to participate in volunteer service? How do participants feel afterward?

Before we analyze these issues, let's review the history and the development of volunteer service.

Humanity - the Essence of Nursing and Volunteerism

The concept of volunteer service has a long developmental in both Eastern and Western society. Volunteer service emphasizes an informal support system and is largely based on an impromptu philanthropy of individuals. It is also based on religion, consanguinity and geographical location that a group of people can benefit others. The foundation of volunteer service in Western society stems from the concept of social responsibility. As a result of industrialization and modernization, governments in Western society experienced budget deficits, and public services became noticeably deficient. This in turn caused the degradation of the general living standard. In order to make up for the deficiency in government service and to reduce the cost of the expenditures,
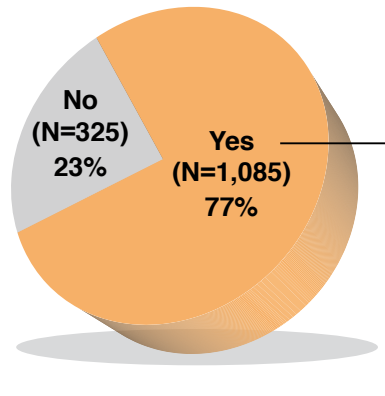
Basic Data Analysis

By Gender	Count	%
Male	38	2.7
Female	1,372	97.3
Total	1,410	100.0
By Education	**Count**	**%**
High School or College	629	44.6
University	729	51.7
Graduate School	52	3.7
Total	1,410	100.0
By Service	**Count**	**%**
Critical Care & ER	318	22.6
Internal Medicine Ward	249	17.7
Surgery Ward	174	12.3
Outpatient Clinic	172	12.2
Other Special Category	157	11.1
Obstetrics & Pediatrics	95	6.7
Psychiatrics	47	3.3
Orthopedics	33	2.3
Neurology/Rehab	16	1.1
Others	149	10.6
Total	1,410	100.0
By Ranking	**Count**	**%**
Junior Registered Nurse	972	68.9
Senior Nurse	172	12.2
Head or Deputy Nurse	129	9.1
Nurse Practitioner	77	5.5
Case Manager	38	2.7
n.a.	22	1.6
Total	1,410	100.0

the model of non-profit organizations supported by the government was born. These non-profit organizations reduce cost by empowering a large number of volunteers. Governments also empower volunteers for public service work. It was under these circumstances that volunteer service emerged. Volunteer service fosters citizenship awareness and expands the practice of social responsibility.

The United Nations proclaimed the year of 2001 as the "International Year of Volunteers". Volunteer service has become an important topic in the world since then. Regulations of volunteer service were passed in the third reading by the Taiwan Legislative Division during the same year. These not only promote the concept of social responsibility among its citizens, but also protect the interest of volunteers. The most outstanding feature of volunteerism is called altruism (the principle or practice of unselfish concern for or devotion to the welfare of others). As volunteers, individuals experience spiritual reward and ask for nothing else in return. One can practice altruism to gain more understanding of the inner self with great spirit and wisdom. Furthermore, performing good deeds enhances one's personal values and leads to improved moral character.

Nursing is a science as well as an art. Nurses help patients to recover and recuperate, to educate correct understanding about disease and illness,

Q1 Did you ever do volunteer service? (N=1,410)

No (N=325) 23%

Yes (N=1,085) 77%

Q2 Types of volunteering? (N=1,085, multiple choices allowed)

Home Visit and/or Care 33.3%

Resource Recycling 30.2%

Community Clean-up 24.6%

Domestic Disaster Relief 12.5%

Living Environment Improvement 12.4%

Tzu Chi Visitor Guide 8.8%

Winter Distribution 7.0%

International Disaster Relief 4.7%

Miscellaneous 61.8%

and to mitigate the impact caused by disabilities. They also help terminally-ill patients to complete their last journey through life with tranquility and human dignity. However, providing professional care for various patients requires some degree of coordination at the psychological level. This includes caring for others, the sense of acceptance, empathy, sincerity, open-communication, interaction with purpose, promises and responsibilities, etc. Simply stated, while involved in the busy and complicated nursing and administrative work, nurses must learn to instill compassion in order to provide the best possible care. It seems like the above characteristics are the prerequisites for willing and helpful volunteers.

80% Volunteered, Mostly Home Visits

Do nurses really have the spare time to volunteer despite their busy schedule? Does volunteering help the nursing profession in any way to grow? Do nurses treat volunteering as a way to increase their occupational development? What do they think about volunteering and what are their overall sentiments? This article is an attempt to focus on understanding the views and feelings of clinical nurses based on a survey results.

The questionnaire in this issue is targeted toward the female nurses in all six Tzu Chi hospitals. Exactly 1,410
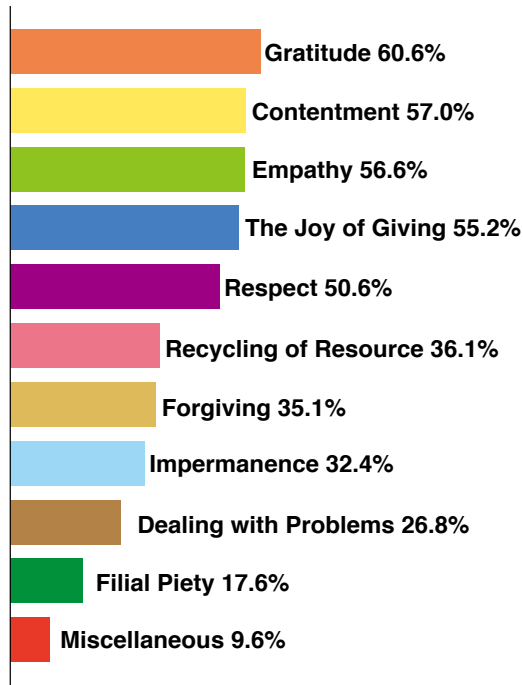
questionnaires were returned. The bulk of the sampling is skewed towards the female population (97% of total sampling with 1,372 counts). The average age is 30.2 (standard deviation at ± 6.7). Fifty-one percent of the population has college education. The majority of volunteer service takes place in intensive care units of the hospitals (about 22.6%). This is followed by internal medicine (17.7%) and surgery (12.3%).

The result of the survey shows that 77% of nurses had experience participating in volunteer service before. It is possible that such a high percentage can be attributed to the frequent volunteering activities within the Tzu Chi organization.
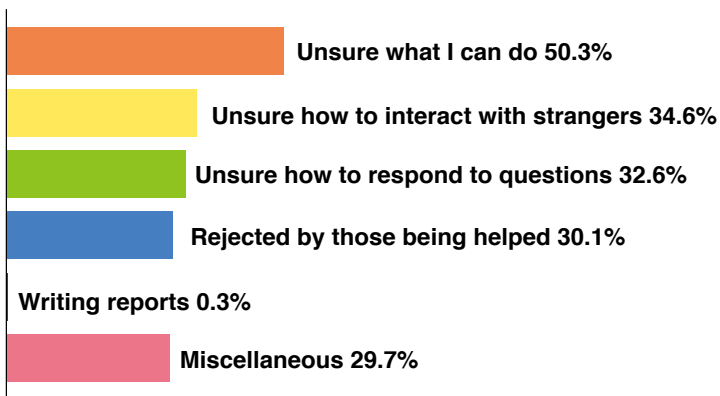
The types of volunteer service of those 80% who had experience in volunteer service include: "Home Care" (33.3%), "Resource Recycling" (30.2%), and "Community Clean-Up" (24.6%). Nurses who are willing to work outside the hospitals and visit patients in their homes (Home Care) would realize the big differences between outpatients and inpatients. In some instances, they can even understand what problems need to be addressed and which matters that require special attention. This has positive significance for growth in the nursing profession.

"Resource Recycling," "Domestic and International Disasters Relief and Clinics" and "Distribution Activities" are unique services of the Tzu Chi volunteers. Although the percentage of participants is

Q3 The biggest gain in volunteer services? (N=1,085, multiple choices allowed)

- Gratitude 60.6%
- Contentment 57.0%
- Empathy 56.6%
- The Joy of Giving 55.2%
- Respect 50.6%
- Recycling of Resource 36.1%
- Forgiving 35.1%
- Impermanence 32.4%
- Dealing with Problems 26.8%
- Filial Piety 17.6%
- Miscellaneous 9.6%

Q4 Difficulties in volunteering? (N=1,085, multiple choices allowed)

- Unsure what I can do 50.3%
- Unsure how to interact with strangers 34.6%
- Unsure how to respond to questions 32.6%
- Rejected by those being helped 30.1%
- Writing reports 0.3%
- Miscellaneous 29.7%

Students in the professional nursing program at the Tzu Chi University can experience the joy of helping people in their communities. Photo depicts students engaging the elderly with games.

relatively low, those who participated said it was extremely satisfying and rewarding. In particular, the experience gained from participating in disaster relief includes life saving techniques that can help others to acquire the right nursing skills. It is similar to the era of Florence Nightingale: To witness disasters and comfort suffering patients, and understand the important role of nursing and the honor that comes with it.
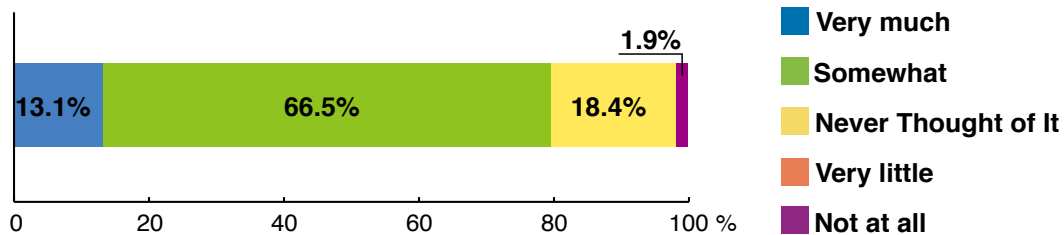
Be Content with Gratitude

How satisfied are the participants?

Almost two thirds of nurses expressed that they learned contentment (57.0%), empathy (56.6%) and respect (50.6%). About 40 percent of the nurses said that they learned the joy of giving (42.5%). About 30 percent of the nurses expressed that they learned resource recycling (36.1%), forgiving (35.1%) and impermanence (32.4%). The other two benefits are learning to deal with problems
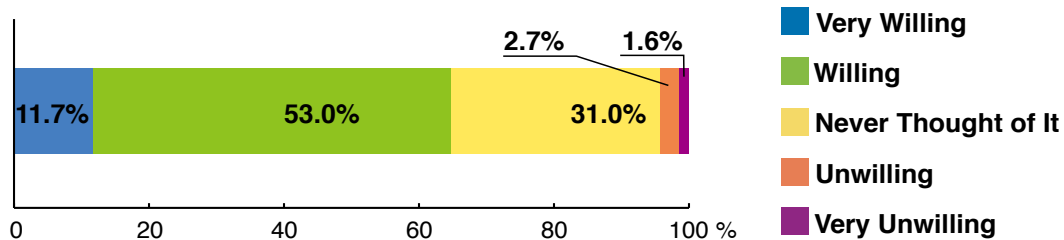
(20.6%) and filial piety (13.5%).

If nurses possess the following professional characteristics: unconditional care for all, showing interest in each case, ability to self-evaluate with honesty and to accept others with respect, then they can establish a warm, joyful, friendly and supportive therapeutic experience. At the same time if they can be empathetic by putting themselves into others' shoes, the feeling of resonance can be established in the same way. The goal is to understand the real requirement or problem of each case in order to provide the professional help with occupational knowledge and skills. Therefore, we realize that volunteer service really has a positive effect on the professional education of the nurses based on the reply of respondents, especially in the aspect of empathy and respect. Gratitude, contentment and the joy of giving serve as amplifiers to strengthen nursing tasks. These attributes allow nurses to acknowledge and understand the value

Q5 How does volunteering affect your caring for patients? (N=1,085)

Very much	Somewhat	Never Thought of It	Very little	Not at all
13.1%	66.5%	18.4%		1.9%

Legend:
- ■ Very much
- ■ Somewhat
- ■ Never Thought of It
- ■ Very little
- ■ Not at all

Q6 Will you volunteer (again)? (N=1,410)

Very Willing	Willing	Never Thought of It	Unwilling	Very Unwilling
11.7%	53.0%	31.0%	2.7%	1.6%

Legend:
- ■ Very Willing
- ■ Willing
- ■ Never Thought of It
- ■ Unwilling
- ■ Very Unwilling

of their profession.

The cultivation of the important professional discipline cannot be obtained from classroom teaching alone. Volunteer service allows nurses to gain the professional discipline.

Careful Planning Helps Transitioning into the Real Situation

Negative comments about volunteering experience include: "Don't know what to do" (50.3%), "Don't know how to interact with strangers" (34.6%), "Don't know how to answer questions properly" (32.6%) and "Rejected by others" (30.1%).

Half of the respondents participating in volunteer services said "I don't know what I can do." They were somewhat unclear of the situation and did not know how to begin right away. This phenomenon provides opportunities for improvement. It is necessary to brief nurses before the actual event. Nurses should know the type of event, the people they deal with, the qualifications required, and the areas of potential learning. These considerations will reduce problems and frustration in volunteer service.

Consider the example of the Tzu Chi Oversea Educational Volunteering Service.

The student nurses of Tzu Chi University realized the biggest reward from volunteer service is spiritual. Photo depicts student nurses participate a community activity for the elderly.

Prior to students' involvement in oversea educational service, a teaching plan is designed based upon the target audience. Intensive training in local language, culture and etiquette are performed for two consecutive weeks prior to departure. The purpose is to reduce the pressure these students may encounter in a different environment. When providing oversea educational service, the service team conducts daily review and discussion about the service to enrich the personal experience of the students.

Indeed, nursing is a service that requires frequent contact with strangers. The ability to answer questions with respect to each individual case is important.

Individuals' rejection of service is very common. Based on the survey, school and hospital officials need to plan more training sessions on the subject of communication. Armed with proper training and support, nurses can happily take part in volunteering activities.

Strengthen Service Quality - a Nursing Mission

Does the experience of volunteer service have any effect on the care for patients?

The combined percentage of "deeply affected" and "affected" is 79.6%. Only 1.9% of respondents replied "not affected."

18.4% of respondents have not thought about whether the volunteer experience has any effect on their clinics at all.

Most nurses recognize the positive impact of volunteer service on effectiveness of patient care. Those who do not find the connection may share their views upon completion of any volunteer activities. They can use diaries or journals to reflect on the process or the activity. By means of reflection and sharing of personal experiences, nurses can gain self confidence in their work. This promotes communication and causes nurses to recognize the value and mission of the profession.

Of course, selecting what types of volunteer service to participate may be based on personal preferences. After all, one is likely not to be touched or moved if it is not a good fit for the participant.

The Goodness of Good Deeds - Persistency

Finally, the questionnaire asked all respondents, with or without volunteer experience, "Will they take part in volunteer service in the future should the opportunity come up?"

The result shows that 11.7% of the nurses are very willing and 53% of them willing. Those unwilling are 5.6% and never thought about it are 31.0%. Obviously, the majority of nurses with experience as volunteers have a positive attitude. It is also encouraging that those who have not considered volunteering may give it another try when the opportunity comes again.

Different types of volunteer services would have different individuality and functionality. They can provide nurses with different spirits and experience. They also give nurses unique professional growth and rewards. Therefore, if organizations or schools can develop and design specific types of volunteer services based on individual needs, more nurses would have the opportunity to grow in their profession.

In recent years, the world has been plagued with countless disasters and hardships. When such crises occur, one can always find the sight of Tzu Chi volunteers dressed in white and blue uniforms comforting the victims. Tzu Chi volunteers are campaigning to recruit more local volunteers as "bodhisattvas" in different communities to help their own people. Tzu Chi volunteers have been doing relief work in Haiti since January 2010 and have also recruited local volunteers. Despite the language barrier, Haitians have interpreted the meaning of "bodhisattva" as a "good Samaritan" doing good deeds in the world. It is just a simple truth to lend a helping hand to victims in their own country. Nurses are doing wonderful things every day, helping the patients and their families. Volunteering is another way to benefit others with unselfish love. The true value of the nursing profession is exemplified with compassion through volunteering.