

An Optimal Workplace

**Building a Positive
Practice Environment**



Advanced technologies and modern architecture make hospital buildings physically spectacular with unique designs. Each hospital has its own character in meeting the public expectation of comfort and safety in addition to modernized medical devices. Nevertheless, all that hardware alone does not create a positive working environment.

A positive working environment requires professional staff, sufficient human resources, excellent management, onsite job training, and protection of the staff's health and safety. A positive working environment works like a magnet that can attract talented individuals and develop their full potential. Is Tzu Chi's working environment a positive one to the nurses? What are the reviews from the staff? The article will explore the opinions of the medical staff throughout six Tzu Chi Hospitals. In addition, present and future effort made by the management team and will also be examined.

Nursing as a career is a rewarding one. With a positive working environment, the hospital can attract more people to join the profession and to retain capable employees. Our goal is to increase the standard of the Taiwan's nursing profession to a level that all can be proud of.



Written by Shu-Chen Wang, Vice Director, Department of Nursing, Hualien Tzu Chi General Hospital

“It is probable that only 33% of nursing staff in Taiwan will remain in the profession after five years; a second last place in global ranking.” The report was made by International Council of Nurses (ICN) in an international survey and released by Taiwan Nurses Association during a news conference on December 22, 2009. This was an appeal from the association hoping the government would give emphasis to this issue. After the press, many are concerned in regards to how the report is perceived. Do professionals agree or disagree with the report findings? Taiwan already has a shortage of nursing staff, and if the working environment can’t retain desired employees, then it wouldn’t be long before the country faces a severe shortage crisis of human capital in nursing.

ICN has been promoting “Positive Practice Environments” since 2007. In facing the crisis of nurse shortage, maintaining an attractive workplace has become particularly important. To coincide with ICN’s campaign, Tzu Chi hospitals would like to explore if the hospitals meet the challenge and if any additional effort can be made to attract and retain talents.

A global shortage of nursing staff

According to ICN’s global nursing profession survey published in the 125th

issue of Taiwan Nursing Academic Society, “Nurses in the Workplace: Expectations and Needs”, nurses from eleven countries including Columbia, Brazil, United States, Canada, Britain, Portugal, South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Japan and Taiwan were surveyed. Two hundred nurses from each country with a total of 2,203 nursing individuals were interviewed. The nurses worked both within and outside the hospital environment during the survey period between April 10, 2009 and May 28, 2009.

The result came out that Taiwan nursing staff has the lowest score in work satisfaction with respect to a heavy workload and a lower compensation. These professionals thought their contributions are not being recognized and almost 33% leave the profession within five years, a percentage that is only better than South Africa. In the report, it kept stressing that “manpower shortage” was the most serious global issue in the nursing profession.

Taiwan is facing the same predicament because a low birth rate is worsening the situation. The number of newborn babies in 2010 is 24,000 less than that of 2009. This means there will be fewer future students and teachers but the aging population requires more health services. It is a global issue. That is why ICN promotes improving the working environment to attract nursing professions to remain in the workforce.

According to the Taiwan Department

Basic Data Analysis

Gender	Count	%
Male	24	1.9
Female	1,254	98.1
Total	1,278	100.0
Nursing Rank	Count	%
N	441	34.5
N1	272	21.3
N2	370	29.0
N3	133	10.4
N4	62	4.9
Total	1,278	100.0
Nurse Position	Count	%
Nurses	1,012	79.2
Deputy head nurses	43	3.4
Head nurses or higher	87	6.8
Case management nurses (include other functional unit)	48	3.8
Nurse practitioners	88	6.9
Total	1,278	100.0

of Health's survey in December 2010, there is only 59.28% of nursing professionals currently working but the first year turnover rate is an astonishing 57.7%.

Positive pay environment – the Eight Parameters

In ICN's definition of Positive Practice Environment, it includes five facets; professional recognition, effective management practices, staff support structures, educational opportunities, and occupational health and safety. It not only

Department	Count	%
Internal Medicine	268	21.0
Surgery	253	19.8
Emergency and Critical Care	278	21.8
Maternity	114	8.9
Community	38	3.0
Functional Unit	32	2.5
Dialysis Unit	38	3.0
Others	257	20.1
Total	1,278	100.0
Education	Count	%
2-year college	191	14.9
Bachelor (including on-job training)	1,016	79.5
Graduate school or higher (including on-job training)	71	5.6
Total	1,278	100.0
Marital Status	Count	%
Single	847	66.3
Married	410	32.1
Divorced	19	1.5
Widowed	2	0.2
Total	1,278	100.0
Residence	Count	%
Hospital dormitory	402	31.5
Rental	279	21.8
Own house	597	46.7
Total	1,278	100.0

focuses on hardware but also hospital management, human resources and education training as well.

In order to fully understand whether all Tzu Chi hospitals meet the requirements of a "Positive Practice Environment", this

cover story is about a questionnaire study based on the eight parameters.

In 2008, the Department of Health and the Nursing Society in Taiwan conducted a project to retain nursing professionals by proposing a framework of eight parameters to evaluate retention strategy. This article is based on the framework to probe the satisfaction level of nursing professionals throughout the six hospitals. We hope to come up with a plan to reduce turnover rate at the Tzu Chi hospitals and create a positive environment according to the global standard.

We sent out a total of 2,800 electronic questionnaires and received 1,278 valid responses: 79.2% of the respondents are clinical nursing staffs, 34.5% at Nursing level (N), and 28.7% at level (N2) with average tenure of 5.1 years. There are 79.5% with bachelor degree in nursing, 66.3% are single, 72.5% are in three rotational shifts, 50.5% work in the same city with their families, 46.7% live in their own homes, 31.5% in dormitory and 21.8% in rental homes.

In the questionnaires, the eight parameters according to Department of Health's guidelines are briefly explained.

1. New staff training and counseling: Establish a training program for the new nursing staff, and set up a clinical counselor system. Supervisors meet with new nurses regularly to ensure effective counseling.

2. Work arrangement: Good coordination and cooperation among departments to simplify workflow and provide relevant tools and manuals.
3. Human resource allocation: Assign new nurses' positions according to their dispositions and aptness, and provide flexibility in work scheduling. Set up a system to allow internal transfer requests.
4. Working environment: Provide safe working environment with a positive team spirit.
5. Support Structure: Establish a counseling system and activities to support staff.
6. Leadership: Strengthen leadership and management skills; establish supervision system.
7. Compensation and benefits: Provide a reasonable compensation package with benefits.
8. Professional growth and development: Provide training for a second area expertise, provide continuing education, onsite training, and establish a system of work assessment and promotion.

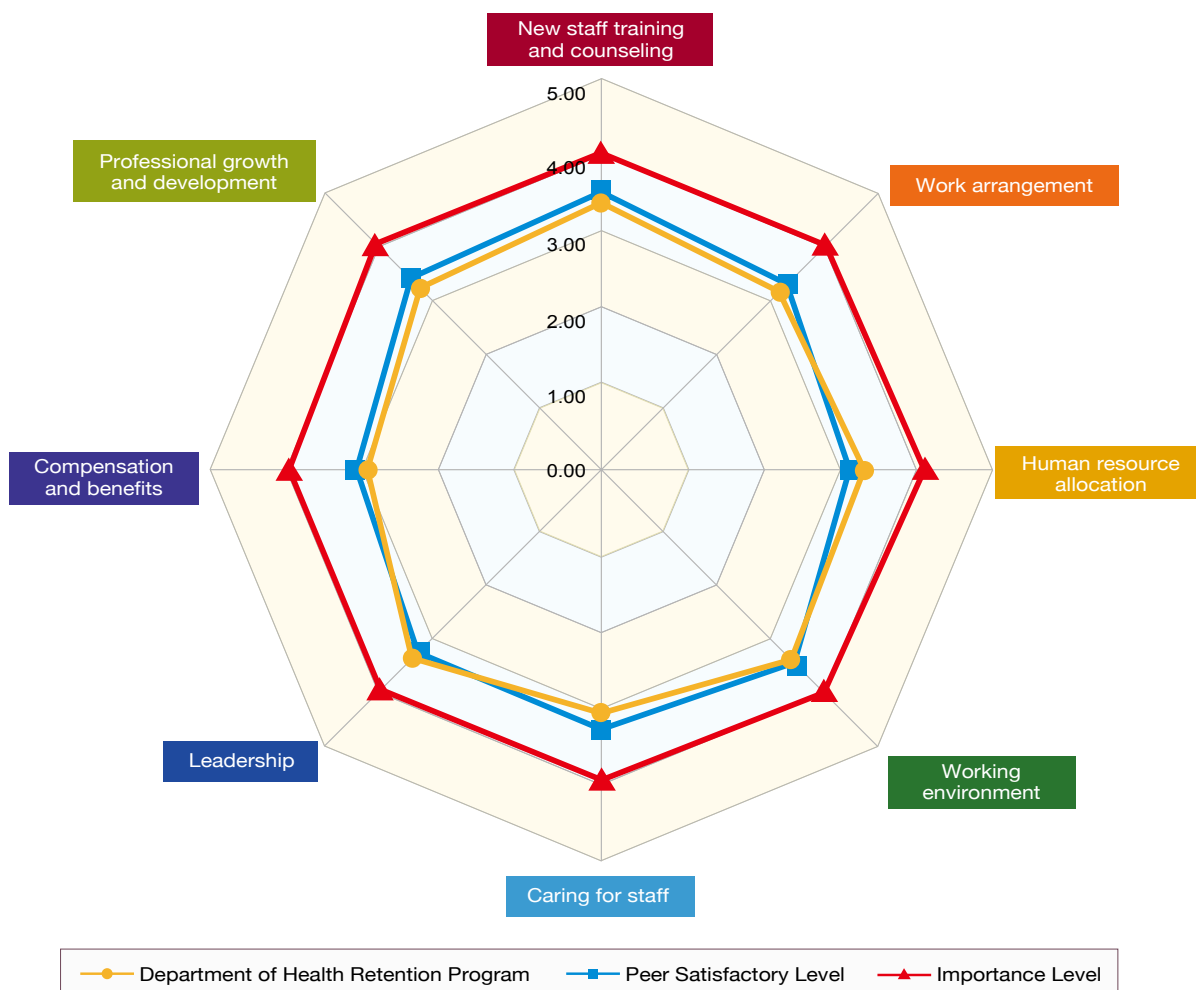
The questionnaire is based on a 5-point scale to evaluate the present satisfaction level.

Communication and human resource allocation

In differentiating the eight parameters' levels of importance, the five-point scale is

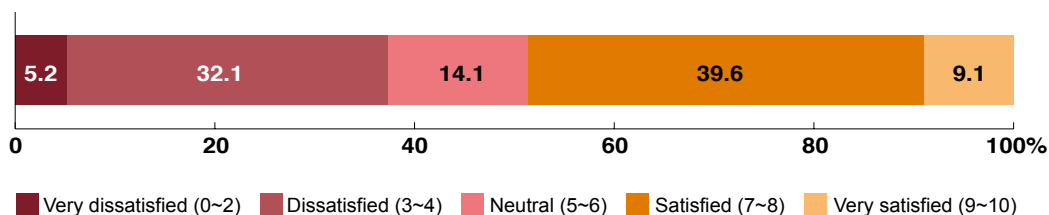
Tzn Chi Hospitals Questionnaire Results

Eight Parameters	Department of Health Retention Program	Staff Satisfactory Level	Staff Importance Level	Discrepancy Between Level of Importance and Satisfaction
New staff training and counseling	3.40 ③	3.53 ①	4.01 ④	0.48 ⑦
Work arrangement	3.24 ⑥	3.35 ④	4.03 ③	0.68 ③
Human resource allocation	3.34 ④	3.15 ⑥	4.10 ①	0.95 ①
Working environment	3.44 ①	3.47 ②	3.99 ⑤	0.52 ⑥
Caring for staff	3.15 ⑦	3.30 ⑤	3.91 ⑦	0.61 ⑤
Leadership	3.41 ②	3.35 ④	3.96 ⑥	0.61 ⑤
Compensation and benefits	2.94 ⑧	3.10 ⑦	3.96 ⑥	0.86 ②
Professional growth and development	3.27 ⑤	3.44 ③	4.06 ②	0.62 ④



Q1

Overall job satisfactory level? (N = 1,278, 0 to 10 Points: 0 = Very Dissatisfied, 10 = Very Satisfied)



used; and almost all eight parameters have four points. This indicates the staff view all parameters as important criteria in making a positive working environment. However, the top four with the highest ranking are: “resource allocation”, “professional growth and development”, “work arrangement” and “new staff training and counseling”. The bottoms three are “compensation and benefits”, “leadership” and “caring for staff”.

When comparing the result to the ICN’s survey on the importance of Positive Practice Environment issue, Tzu Chi’s results presented some interesting points. On a 10-point scale, most of the surveyed items scored 8.5 or higher. For example, “ability to openly communicate between team and peers” scores 9.0, “sufficient and adequate resources for safety” is at 8.9, “access to adequate information for the best medical treatment” gets 8.9, “occupational health and safety measure and procedures” is 8.9, “clear work responsibilities” receives 8.8, “relationship

between management and counselors” has 8.8, “pay and benefit in line with education, qualification and professional responsibilities” is at 8.7.

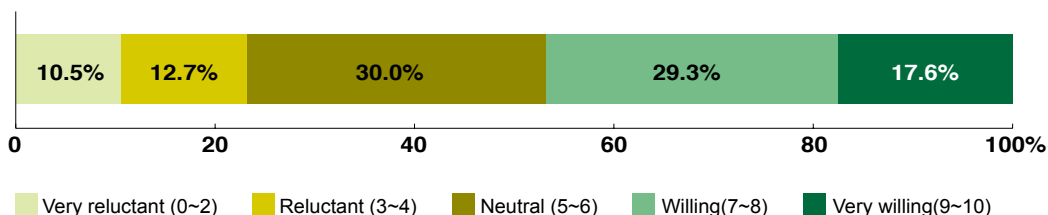
The survey results revealed a similar expectation between Tzu Chi nursing staff and the global nursing professional. While salary, benefits and leadership management are important to both groups, the most important parameter is “human resource allocation” to Tzu Chi hospital employees, in contrast to “open team communication” to global nursing professionals.

The most satisfied vs. the least satisfied

Among the survey done by Tzu Chi medical staff, the most satisfactory criteria is “new staff training and counseling” followed by “work environment”. The third is “professional growth and development” with the lowest satisfactory level in “compensation and benefits”

Q2

**Intent to stay for next year? (N = 1,278, 0 to 10 Points:
0 = Very Dissatisfied, 10 = Very Satisfied)**



and “human resource allocation”. In the Health Department’s retention program, the highest satisfactory level is “working environment”, “leadership” and “new staff training and counseling” and the lowest satisfaction level is “compensation and benefits” followed by “caring for staff”.

Result from ICN’s Positive Practice Environment indicated the three areas that show biggest difference between level of importance and level of satisfaction: many felt that “compensation and benefit” is not in accordance to education, qualification and professional responsibilities; insufficient and inadequate resources for “work environment safety”, and a lack of “caring for staff” policy to help medical workers in balancing life between work and family. Among the parameters, Taiwan and the global nursing counterparts both expressed unsatisfactory in “compensation and benefits”.

With the exception of “human resource allocation” and “leadership”, survey results

from Tzu Chi nursing staff indicated that the remaining six parameters had a slightly higher satisfactory level compared to the Health Department’s retention program survey two years ago. Of course, this survey is generic in nature and does not address the details, so it should only be used as guidelines for future work.

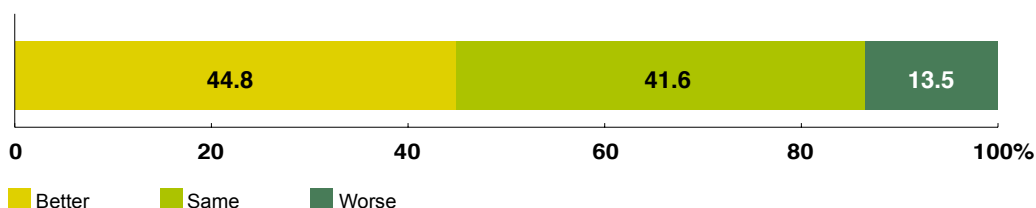
Human resource allocation

Let’s focus on the “human resource allocation” parameter which was deemed most important by the Tzu Chi nursing staff. If Tzu Chi hospitals can make improvement in this area, it should be able to increase retention rate and make Tzu Chi hospitals a great professional environment. Currently, the satisfaction level is near the bottom and is truly an area where management felt discouraged by the survey results.

In practice, Tzu Chi hospital management distributes resources based on bed occupancy rate. However, with a

Q3

My unit's working environment vs. Other nursing units? (N = 1,278)



lower than expected new recruit; especially the eastern region Hualian, it became a big challenge. Therefore, Tzu Chi held a joint recruitment program in 2009, with TV commercials to attract students to the nursing profession. Tzu Chi Hospitals also sponsored scholarship programs to help retain nursing students after their internships are completed.

Since the “new staff training and counseling” area had the highest satisfactory level among nurses, the hospital and management must be on the right track. All new nurses starting at the hospital must attend basic training with the guidance of clinical nursing staff. They have routine interviews with the management during their probation period. Only after passing both tests would they be allowed to care for patients independently. Every now and then, the management is faced with a dilemma. While they need to implement rigorous training programs to ensure staff qualification, they worry that the strict training schedule is too

stressful and will deter new staff members. Nevertheless, veteran nurses are always appreciative of the new stream of energy instilled from the new nurses.

Once during hospital rounds, a senior nurse asked the new nurse, “Have you passed your probation?”

The new nurse responded, “Yes! I have passed my probation period!”

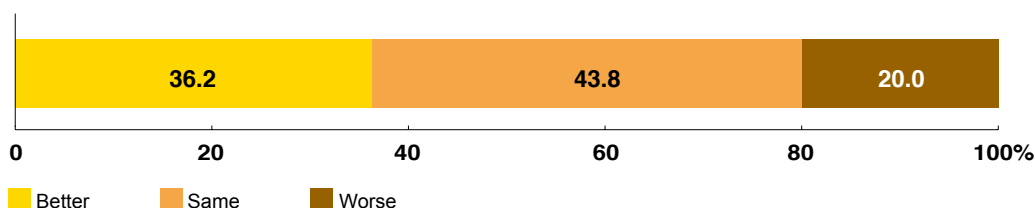
Her enthusiasm was quite contagious and reminded the senior nurse of her own passion for the profession despite some of the less than ideal situations she had encountered lately.

The new nurse explained, “I ran into many obstacles during my training here but every time I receive encouragement from the management or see the senior nurses care for the patient with love, I feel proud to be a nurse at this hospital.”

In “working environment” framework, Tzu Chi scored a second highest level of satisfaction, indicating the approval of nurses regarding management’s effort and success in creating a positive team

Q4

My unit's working environment vs. Non-nursing departments? (N = 1,278)



environment, with staff care and counseling activities.

Consistent care and team cohesion

Results of this survey also revealed that half of the nurses live in dormitory or leased apartments; they are considered as “out-of-townners”. In order to care for the non-local staff, Tzu Chi volunteer, Yi-De mothers (Tzu Chi Commissioners), initiated a program in which every hospital wing has a Yi-De mother to look after the staff, help celebrate birthdays, console the staff’s down moments and broaden their horizons.

In addition, the annual nursing and newcomer staff forum provide an opportunity for interaction and exchange. The topics are not just about nursing but also involve cross-functional discussions such as pharmacy dispensing procedure, human resource in relation to salary structure, uniform cleaning in the general services and other topics to meet the

various needs of the staff. There are also many after-hour social groups to help nursing staff to relax and unwind. Personal health management is available to promote a healthy work environment.

In the area of “professional growth and development”, improving the quality of clinical care has always been the goal of the hospital. In addition to head nurses making rounds to hospital rooms, the directors of nursing department also visit rooms daily to conduct training sessions and sponsor ethical and cross-functional forum. This is to facilitate better understanding of other departmental professionals and nursing staffs’ duties. It will guide nurses to a variety of help when encountering problems and allow the professional teams to reach consensus.

Raising the quality of life personally and professionally

Based on the result of this survey, nursing staffs believe the advancement

of their professional abilities can't be measured by monetary values as "compensation and benefit". Nevertheless, Tzu Chi hospitals have implemented bi-annual bonuses so that N3 and N4 level staff received salary increases even during the economic downturn. It is an effort to retain more qualified nursing staff.

The hospital management has made great effort in establishing policies to encourage retention of nursing staff by sponsoring skill-enhancement trainings, writing classes as well as English training courses to improve professional competency. In addition, there are therapeutic massage sessions to help relax nursing staff. However, based on the latest survey and feedback, there is still quite a bit of room for improvement in the work area.

The ICN study surveyed the percentage of time nurses spent on caring for patient. The result showed 21% of the nurses spent 100% of their working hours with patients, 45% spent about ¾ of the time, 20% spent half of the time, 9% spent only about ¼ of the time, and 5% spent less than ¼ of their time. Survey also reveals that nurses' favorite way to spend their working hours is "patient contact" because nothing is more rewarding than direct feedback from patients and families. Manpower shortage and overworked nurses will greatly degrade the care quality which is the greatest concern among all clinical nurses.

Alarming turnover rate needs expedited resolution

The average satisfaction level index from this survey regarding their overall work was 6.12, lower than the Health Department survey of 6.53 conducted two years ago. On question regarding staff's intent to stay at the current position for next year, the average result was 5.98, lower than the target of 6.38. On a percentage basis, about 23% of staff would unlikely stay at their current positions with a combined 37.3% satisfaction level. This is quite an alarming level of job dissatisfaction. The statistics are averages based on surveys conducted from all six Tzu Chi hospitals; the hospitals must understand the specific issue facing each hospital in order to address it effectively.

Talent retention is an important issue that requires management attention. The positive atmosphere of a unit takes great leadership as well as individual contributors. Nearly half (44.8%) of the nursing staff believed their nursing unit was better than other nursing unit, only 13.5% thought theirs were inferior. But there were 20% of the nursing staff who believed their working environment was worse than colleagues in other departments. And 36.2% of the nurses thought nursing jobs were better than other positions in the hospital.

Globally, about 52% of the nurses believe that the medical system and

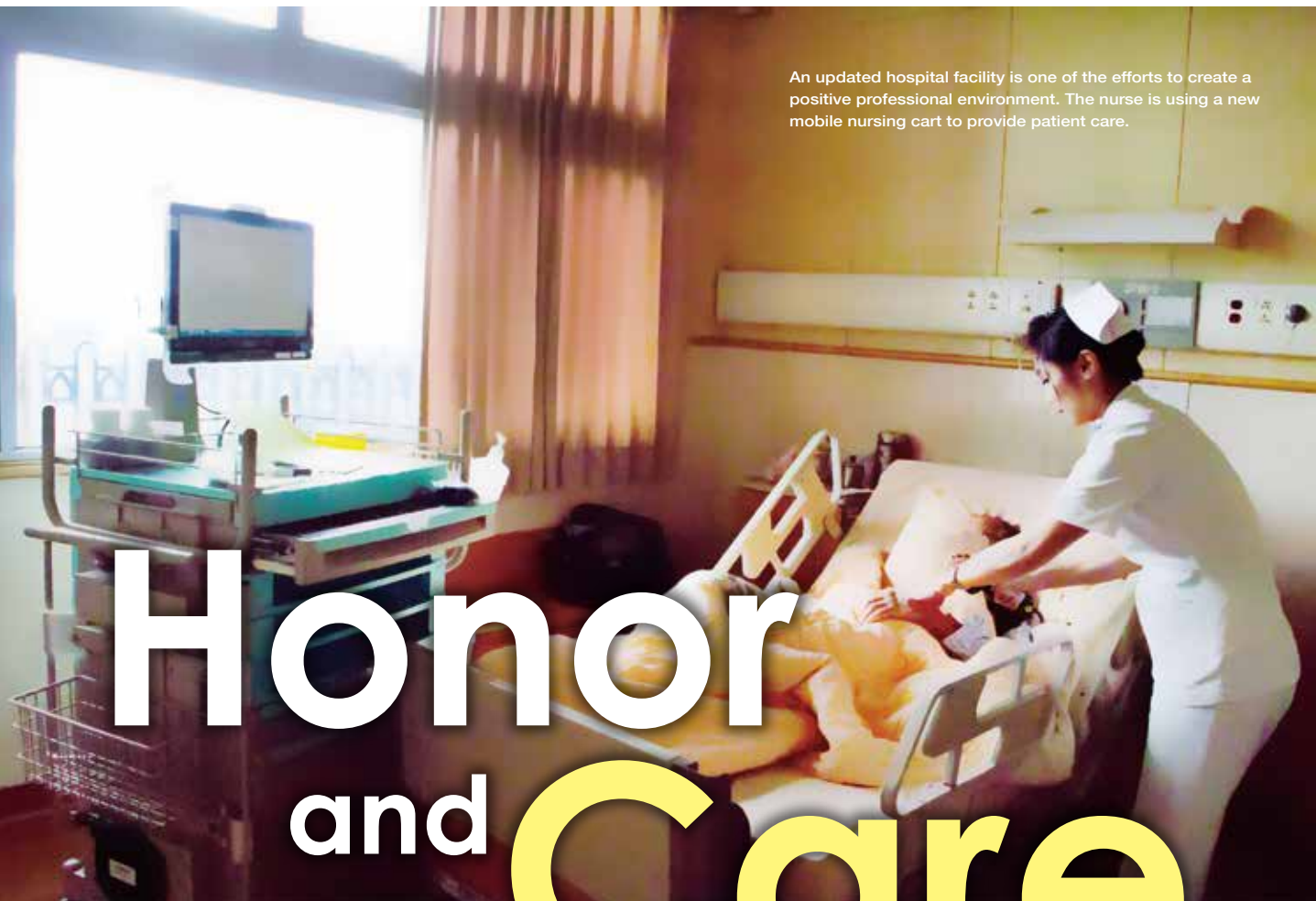


To Recruit and retain nursing staff is the first priority of Tzu Chi hospitals. We would try various positive ways to build an attractive workplace.

resources, professional training and promotional opportunities are better than five years ago. But in Taiwan, close to half of the nursing staff feel their workload is heavier than five years ago. About more than half of nursing staff surveyed globally believe there is a high probability for them to remain in the nursing profession in the next five years. Portugal has 77%, Brazil 75%, Canada 71% and USA 68% indicates that they “definitely” will stay in nursing. We can leverage these countries’ medical policy and working environment as our model for our hospitals.

The serious issue of manpower shortage is affecting the global nursing profession. High job dissatisfaction level

and staff shortage is now becoming a vicious cycle. When nursing units are understaffed, peers must work overtime to care for patients. In the long run, many nurses are burnt-out and exhausted from long work hours. They are most likely to consider switching profession or transfer to smaller clinics to lessen their workload. Tzu Chi nurses have access to diverse training courses, heartwarming patient-nurse relationships and a team of volunteers who support their work. To create a positive practice environment, the first goal should focus on how to improve the overall satisfaction level, and to align resource with support in nursing to realize the beauty of this life-saving profession.



An updated hospital facility is one of the efforts to create a positive professional environment. The nurse is using a new mobile nursing cart to provide patient care.

Honor and Care

**Staffing Policies and Humanistic
Care for Nurses in Hualien**

May is the biggest festival month for Tzu Chi volunteers around the world. The month combines celebration for Buddha's birthday, Tzu Chi anniversary, and Mother's Day. It is also a special month for nursing professionals because it is the birthday of Florence Nightingale and also Nurses' Day. In this month, when visitors and patients walk by the hospital's first floor corridor, they will see the Exhibition of Nursing Glory which displays photos of outstanding nurses. Sometimes when patients see those nurses, they will say: "I just saw your photo. You are one of the outstanding nurses!" Although our nursing colleagues are shy about the nominations, they are also honored that their efforts are being recognized. The poster exhibition in the nursing corridor is one of the creative efforts to demonstrate nursing values. Each year Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital creates new ways to publicly showcase the overlooked values of nursing professionals.

Attract nursing aid to remote area

According to a 2005 National Department of Health survey, the clinical nursing staff's turnover rate was relatively high: annual turnover rate rose from 22.19% in 2001 to 28.02% in 2004, which is above the current turnover rate standard set by the hospital accreditation. Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital is located in the eastern region of Taiwan, and most of the nurses come from the south. Whenever additional new hospital beds are added in the south, there is significant change in our nursing staff. The turnover rate of nursing staff was 13.5 ~ 15.7% from 2004 to 2006, while new staff turnover rate was as high as 26 ~ 41%. Since Tzu Chi Hospital first opened in 1986, it has continued to adapt different strategies based on the needs of the staff and market, hoping to retain nursing staff. In 2007 and 2008, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital received grants from the National Department of Health to carry out pilot programs with various measures to retain nurses. The incentive program for enhancing care quality from the National Health Insurance Bureau in 2009 to 2010 also helped to retain our nursing staff effectively.

When the hospital first opened, Hualien was still a place of rural lifestyle without many city attractions. To facilitate the nursing staff's settlement in

Hualien, bedding and quilts were provided in the dormitory so that staff could move in with just some personal belongings. The dormitory was equipped with fitness, table tennis, music, and MTV rooms as well as yoga, aerobics, and tai-chi clubs. The hospital also offered a MTV fund for young nursing staffs to upgrade popular sound tracks so that they could relax and have some recreation after work. The neighborhood around Hualien city has prosperously developed with booming tourism in recent years, and young people need not worry about a lack of entertainment.

Salary incentive program and a simplified workflow

Being the only medical center in the eastern Taiwan, the severity and complexity of our patients' diseases are high, with inpatient illness severity (CMI value) ranking third, only after the National Taiwan University Hospital and the Veterans General Hospital. Some nursing staff quit their jobs because in heavy workload, overtime, and stress. In addition, some of them decide to pursue advanced studies, resulting in manpower shortages across all nursing units. To solve the resource problem, the hospital increased the number of openings for nursing assistants. It is also fortunate to have volunteers in assisting with the non-professional part of the job. The hospital uses information technology to

improve the service process, mobile carts and computers in all units to simplify the workflow of nursing care.

In terms of compensation, Tzu Chi offers consecutive years of annual promotion, paid license fees and special allowances if they remain on the staff for three years. It also provides renewal allowance to retain staff for five years. In recent years, after Tzu Chi has expanded to six hospitals, the step-up allowance from N to N4 has also increased every year to encourage employees to advance their career and professional competency. Incentive bonus is offered to encourage people to work in the remote eastern region of Hualien and Taitung. As a result, the turnover rate of the nursing staff dropped to a historical low of 10%.

From retaining people to retaining talents

The nursing staff in the early days was mostly from vocational schools without licenses. The hospital then provided tutoring service after work to help them obtain licenses and encouraged on-the-job studies. Tzu Chi Institute of Technology and the Tzu Chi University are located nearby, making it convenient to study continuing education. The hospital also provides tuition assistance and time-off so that employees can pursue advanced studies while working at the hospital.

In recent years, the nursing department launched an elite program to offer

scholarships for personal and professional development in pursuit of master's and doctoral degrees. The retention strategies have transformed from retaining people to retaining talents. In addition to on-the-job study programs, many clinical staffs have participated in the Department of Health's pilot project since 1992 to promote a professional competency advancement. To encourage motivation for advancement, qualifications for advancement have been added in the promotion policy to increase participation.

Training new recruits via multiple channels

In recent years, new staff members often quit their jobs halfway through the training due to high work pressure. Therefore, Tzu Chi has implemented a



Hualien Tzu Chi General Hospital honors its outstanding nurses and shares the glory on the annual International Nurse Day. The photo shows the Exhibition of Nursing Glory along the hospital corridor in May 2010.

one-on-one special clinical mentoring system. Clinical mentors have adopted a technique that exercises more positive encouragement than negative reinforcement. The mentors have improved their teaching methods and created simulations of real situations to enhance clinical skills of new staff members. The head nurse would coordinate with medical staff and the director of patient rooms to participate in joint discussions in order to promote communication and coordination with other team members.

Moreover, the hospital would organize new staff forums to encourage the interactions among peers so that they can exchange support and encouragement. As a matter of fact, if new staff can survive the first few months that are the most difficult, things will become better afterward. Not only home-like dormitories are provided, a team of volunteer task force is established to accompany new recruits. The warm and home-like atmosphere in the dormitory significantly improves the turnover rate of new staff.

Participate in decision-making to enhance job satisfaction

Our internal hospital survey indicates that if a nurse's tenure increases, he/she will have higher job satisfaction and probability to stay. When nurses receive better support from peers, supervisors as well as family and friends, job satisfaction

among the nursing staff improves. Opportunities for career advancement also improve job satisfaction and willingness to remain in the same working environment. Therefore, job satisfaction is in direct proportion to the retention of employees. It is clear that career development, stress reduction, advancement opportunities, and peer support can increase job satisfaction which is important in employees' retention.

Tzu Chi Hospital discovered from accumulated experience that creating a humanistic care environment for nurses can stimulate interests and ethics. When nurses are satisfied and confident, and can identify with the hospital, they are more willing and likely to stay. As recommended by the International Council of Nurses, the hospital includes the entry-level nursing staff to participate in policy-making process. For example, quarterly meetings are held so that everyone can report their interactions with patients, peers, colleagues and supervisors. The administration also incorporates suggestions or comments about dormitory life, work, and environment to improve facilities and processes. In addition to the head nurse, the hospital director and other department heads also allocate time to visit and have direct interactions with the staff. Being able to hear voices from the grassroots makes it possible to understand the big picture. To enhance



Building a positive practice environment takes a collective effort. The volunteers of Yi-De Club offer familial care to the nursing staff, especially the newcomers. They hold regular, major activities, and from time to time, they go to each unit to visit the nurses. The photo shows one volunteer mom and Director of Nursing Dept. Shu-Chuan Chang giving gifts to the nursing staff.

job satisfaction, two-way communication is effective and crucial.

Year after year, the hospital is still striving to recruit new personnel and retain talents. Those who have remained from the start are the department heads and administrators who have overcome adversities. It is with the support from both the hospital and the volunteers

support teams that nurses could build faith and confidence. People who have entered nursing are those who embrace challenges and willingly dedicate their lives to this noble profession. Tzu Chi hospitals will continue to improve themselves to retain nurses and welcome new recruits into the big family.