



The Spirit of Nightingale and Tzu Chi

Pen-Jung Wang, President, Tzu Chi University

The rainfall in Taiwan is over 2,800 millimeter per year, three times of world average. However, it is in the 18th place among the countries that have shortages of fresh water. Besides high population density, urbanization and industrialization also increase the consumption of water. Other major factors include the lack of river distributions, poor soil and water conservation, all contribute to the problem of water shortage.

The same analogy applies in the current education system in Taiwan. There are 13,000 nursing graduates from universities and colleges every year. Taiwan has over 220,000 people who have acquired professional nursing licenses, but only 130,000 of them are in actual practice. The rate of brain drain is over 40%.

The loss of nursing manpower is also an indication of the waste of education resource and a big hit on education goal. The reasons are complicated, It includes health insurance system, hospitals' management culture, lack of respect to the nursing profession, overworking hours, night shifts, relationship with patients, career planning, family factors and etc. How to enhance the profession image, improve the working environment and provide reasonable compensation are areas that all sectors need to work together. It cannot be solved easily by raising 3% of payroll, addressed by President Ma. From the educational point of view, besides enhancing professional knowledge and skills, reestablishing the mission and value of "nursing mission" is also very urgent.

As everyone knows, in the history of nursing, the greatest pioneer was Florence Nightingale. Her spirit represents the nursing spirit. In 1823 she was born in an upper-class British family in Italy. She took nursing work and education as her lifelong task. When Crimean War exploded in 1854, she convinced a military officer to allow her and a few nurses to take charge with hospital work at the military camp in Scutari Barracks. Busy morning and night, they carefully took care of the wounded in every possible way. This gained her the nickname of "The Lady with the Lamp." And after war, under support of the British government she set up the first formal nursing school at St. Thomas' Hospital in London.

At the beginning of the school establishment, the formal nursing education was seen as a heresy that infringed doctors' profession. Due to this challenge, Nightingale adopted serious requirements of students, including morality, culture, desire for perfection, thinking ability, physical agility and religious compassion. The curriculum consisted of nursing principles, skills cultivation, independent thinking, ethics and morals, problem solving ability and clinical practice. Nightingale put great emphasis on students' clean appearance, gentle attitude, modest behavior, diligent work, skills and moral standard. This reversed the misunderstanding of the society and denial of interested parties. The nursing professional spirit and education system that Nightingale set up was highly respected, and it spread from Britain to Europe, America and Asian countries. It serves as the standard of modern nursing profession, and has firmly established nursing profession's social standing.

Many may feel the story as somewhat familiar, Nightingale's emphasis of nursing spirit and education goals completely conforms to Tzu Chi's spirit and education ideas – "Cultivating professionals to life-long learning; to think and analyze; to collaborate with the team; and to equip with Tzu Chi's humanity spirit." Tzu Chi's education ideas emphasize on students' clothing and appearance, behavior and manners, life and morality education and establishing correct view of life and values. Only through this, the professional image can be established and professional dignity can be inspired.

Nightingale's religious spirit is the same as Tzu Chi's spirit. Her education idea is too match to Dharma Master Cheng Yen's. We need to promote "Tzu Chi's Nightingale spirit." to all Tzu Chi nursing staff. At the same time, we also need to follow "Nightingale's Tzu Chi spirit." So every Tzu Chi's nurse is "the Lady with the Lamp."



The professors from Tzu Chi University are turning the tassel for graduating students. President Wang encourages nursing students to face futrue challenges with the spirit of Nightingale.