



A Moment with Silent Mentors

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When I first visited Tzu Chi medical school, I had heard a “Silent Mentor Program” which accepts voluntary corpses for anatomic practice. I was nevertheless overcome with emotion when I had the opportunity to participate in the program and benefit from it.

People in Taiwan willingly donate their bodies after death to Tzu Chi Medical Simulation Center as cadavers. Operation theater nurses assist in the practice learn the greatness of these donors. (Photo provided by Tzu Chi Medical Simulation Center)





Helping teachers to complete their great wishes

In Tzu Chi's medical school, simulated surgery training is set up exactly as it is in an operating room, so surgical nurses are always needed on site. And all nurses from the various Tzu Chi hospitals take turns to go.

My turn was last August. Though my predecessors had told me what to expect, I was still very nervous because I was the only one from my unit to go. Yet to my relief, all the medical staff and my partners-to-be were very nice and made me feel at ease.

The simulated surgery lasts for four days. On the chilly morning of the initiating ceremony, I changed into my nurse uniform and met others in the practice hall. In addition to doctors, there were also donors' families, students, and volunteers.

Led by Dharma Masters from the Adobe of Still Thoughts, we encircled the donors and chanted sutra as a farewell tribute to the cadavers. At that moment, my heart quivered in awe of their final sacrifice and my eyes began to tear up unconsciously.

When the class began, we prayed and watched video clips of the donors' life. As I was watching the video, I realized the reasons behind the sacrifice transcend fear and pain. One of a donor had refused receiving treatment in the final stage of his illness because he wanted to keep

his body intact for the students. Donating one's body for anatomic practice is not widely accepted for Asians because most people believe it is respectful to keep a person's body whole after death. Combating against disease and tradition, this particular story made a lasting impact in my heart.

To be honest, I was a little scared in the beginning, but after watching the pictures and video clips, I came to realize the donors' willingness to give and I became less afraid. I began to view them as real teachers demonstrating a lesson. During the exercise, every cut on the cadaver made my heart wince. After several classes, the bodies of our "silent mentors" were scored with ragged strokes due to the immature skills and different practices of others. Still, we knew that they had known and accepted this when they decided to make the donation. Thus the sacrifice that the "silent mentors" made extended their values and teachings beyond their death. By voluntarily providing their bodies as training grounds, they could make sure the doctors-to-be are well prepared to serve real patients in the future. This reminded me of what Master Cheng Yen has taught us, "We do not have a claim on our life, but only the right to use it."

Even though we were just practicing, we were as serious as if we were performing real treatment. No one made jokes and everyone was respectful. In the regular surgery room we tried to rescue living

people, and this was the preparation for it. We want to learn the lesson thoroughly and completely so the good will of our “silent mentors” would not be in vain.

Treasure every moment of practice

As opposed to the regular surgery where each operation had its separated space, the simulation center has eight beds for eight different groups. Each group had a different schedule, and we all worked together as a team to help clean the tools and the environment when each group

finished its work.

I have learned a lot from this training, and met many nurses from other Tzu Chi hospitals. I was very grateful for the camaraderie and teamwork I developed with my peers from the Dalin Tzu Chi General Hospital. The atmosphere of cooperative and mutual help was very memorable. The most important lessons I learned were appreciation and contribution. I came to realize that we should appreciate what we have and the people around us more. And, I learned about the unselfish love and contribution for the benefit of others.



Though accustomed to doing the same work in a regular surgery ward, Ssu-Yi has gained a refreshed vision toward life from the unselfish sacrifice of the silent mentor.