



# Take Care of the Tribes

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Hualien is an ethnically diverse county. According to the 2012 published data by the Internal Affairs of Taiwan, the number of aboriginal people residing in the Hualien County reached 9,952, the highest of all counties in Taiwan. There are 14 aboriginal tribes in Taiwan, six of which are located in Hualien. As expected, the indigenous people are one of the main groups of patients we care for at our hospital. I am a nurse at the OBGYN department. Perhaps the lack of job opportunities in the eastern region, the younger generation tends to move out of the area in search of work. As a result, we often see elderly aborigines seeking healthcare alone. Because they speak mainly their aboriginal languages, we often face with major communication issues in a predominantly Mandarin-speaking hospital environment.

As soon as the clinic door opens every morning, the hospital outpatient area is bustling with patients. We often see aboriginal patients

wandering in the first-floor clinic area. Being an aborigine, I would approach them with a simple greeting such as, “Ma do so? Ba Yi” meaning “How are you, Ma’am?” That is how we greet an aboriginal elderly lady. In response, they would smile and say, “I nu ga niyi?” (Where am I). Holding out the forms in their hands, they ask questions like how to get to the Department of Metabolic Medicine. These are common scenes at the outpatient clinic area.

Whenever aboriginal elders visit our clinics, I would always communicate in Truku language to help answer any questions they might have. Once, an elderly woman arrived on wheelchair accompanied by a foreign caregiver. Speaking in broken Mandarin, the patient stated, “Doctor, my stomach has been growling and feeling bloated all night. I couldn’t sleep at all. I’ve been seen at our local clinic, but I still don’t feel well.” After examining the patient, the doctor asked, “Ma’am, where does it hurt?” She frowned

while touching her stomach and said, “The pain just wouldn’t go away. I was up all night, Doctor!” Detecting her Truku accent, I asked in my native tongue, “Ba yi! Inu ga malaibi m-na-rux su?” (Ma’am, where is it bothering you?). Her grimace of pain was quickly replaced by a more relaxed appearance. She described that she had been in pain for two weeks with abdominal bloating, irregular bowel movement, and poor appetite. Assuming the role of an interpreter, I relayed her message to the doctor and also explained to her the doctor’s assessment and proposed treatment plans. After the visit, I went over the instructions regarding her medication and diet. She held my hands tightly and said, “It is wonderful to see people from my own tribe here. Where are you from?” I said, “I’m from Xiulin Village.”

Despite the ethnic diversity among their 14 Taiwanese aboriginal tribes, aboriginal people all share a common nature of ardent and kind hearts. Each tribe carries its own unique ethnic character and traditions. A Taroko woman with early-stage cervical cancer came to the hospital after being diagnosed at our mobile clinic. Due to familiarity and religious reasons, she had spent two years at another hospital but seen no improvement and was eventually transferred to our hospital. After speaking with her in her native language, I learned that due to her unfamiliarity with our facility and the service we provide she was reluctant to seek treatment with us. Once I understood her situation, I stayed with her throughout the examination and voiced her concerns and worries to the doctor. Through the process, we hoped to give her a better understanding of her illness and the courage she needed to receive the upcoming



**Hsiu-Ying Lu is happy to help people from her tribe either with translation or health education needs while caring for her patients, fulfilling her mission and responsibility as a Taroko.**

treatments. This patient is now in a stable condition after our care and will return for a follow-up visit in six months.

“Treating patients like your own family” has been the principle I live by since pursuing my nursing career. Particularly, I employ the “Just do it” attitude, a Jing Si Aphorism, in my daily practice. As a nurse, I am a facilitator, an interpreter, and a coach. As a Truku person, I believe this is also my mission and responsibility. I vow to stand by the quote from the classic “The Age of Great Harmony” - “All people respect and love their own parents and children, as well as the parents and children of others.” I will continue to care for every single patient.