



# Here Comes the Empress

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Who knew that our usual routine of day-to-day clinical care would be touched by the intrigue and spectacle of an ancient Chinese TV drama series?

## Empress No Longer Afraid of Needles

In December of 2013, a fifty-plus-year-old lady with intense pain due to multiple bone metastases breast cancer finally agreed to be admitted to the hospital for a course of chemotherapy. It was only through the persistent efforts of her family and the attending physician that she acquiesced to the treatment that might improve the quality of her life.

At first, her family repeatedly requested to put her under anesthesia, explaining that she was very afraid of needles, pain, and the nausea or vomiting that are common side effects of chemotherapy. Understanding those fears, I sought to reassure her and carefully explained the details of the intravenous treatment. We were all shocked by her reaction to the discussion. Not only did

she start to weep immediately, but her cries were so loud that it was heard throughout the ward.

Recalling that her family said that she liked to be called “Empress”, I resorted to mimic a traditional Chinese servant by referencing some ancient rituals while explaining our state-of-the-art modern Western medicine plan for her cancer treatment. With the doctor’s added comforting assurance, my “Empress” finally gave up on the idea of going home and accepted the treatment plan.

In the following week, our Empress refused to comply with the day’s care plan unless all details, including possible side effects of the treatments, were painstakingly explained to her. Her refusals were particularly robust if these details were not sufficiently described in the context of the imperial Chinese rituals. This certainly caused additional tension and anxiety among the members of her nursing team. On the day of her discharge, she held my hand and said thanks. She appreciated very much that we had patiently encouraged her and, more

importantly, also respected her personality so that she could successfully complete her first course of chemotherapy.

To our surprise, she would later request to have only our nursing team attend to her at future clinic visits, so that she might continue her treatment as the “Empress”. Her family told us we had earned the Empress’ trust and desired our explanation and approval of all her future treatments. While chatting with her at the end of another round of treatment, the Empress even confided that she had slowly overcome her fear of needles. Hearing this made me truly happy for her.

### **An Old Friend from Yuli Township**

I am still impressed recalling the family of Brother Xie, who represented my first encounter with acute myelogenous leukemia, ten years ago.

Brother Xie was from Yuli of Hualien. He was single and handling a noodle store in the market together with his parents. It was a happy normal country life until Brother Xie’s sudden hospitalization. In addition to doctors’ detailed explanations with the patient, our nursing team taught his family other things like the rules of urban living; for example, how to take the elevator and how to look for the traffic lights to cross the road, etc. With time passing, we were like a family. Even though Brother Xie succumbed to the disease and passed away, his families still remember the warm experience as if we were going through the ordeal together. They appreciate our teaching and always show their generous hospitality to us, till today.

### **Patient Trust**

Su-Fung had a late stage colorectal cancer. She began a long and lengthy journey of travelling back and forth on the trains of “Huadong Railway” to undergo the biweekly chemotherapy. A few years later, her husband also discovered to have a stage four oral cancer. The couple thus dropped to a very low point. Finally, her husband decided to accept the aggressive treatment after the otolaryngologists’ detailed explanation and encouragement. Along with our cheering for the couple, Su-Fung continued to take care of her husband in preparation for his coming surgery although Su-Fung was tired right after her own chemotherapy.

Just the day before surgery, in front of the ENT physician and our nursing team, Su-Fung yelled out: “I entrust my husband to you all!” Her loving words for her husband really saddened our hearts. With her trust, we felt the biggest accomplishment in our career of clinical nursing work! Later, Su-Fung conditions worsen, her health gradually declined, but she still came to say hello on wheelchair. She is now an angel in heaven. We know in our hearts that she was such a nice, understanding and good patient.

Knowing so many patients like a family, I cannot help but thinking the achievement in nursing care is the recognition and trust earned from our patients and their families. And, it is also my driving force to stick to the job of nursing.