



# Guardian the Elders Geriatrics in Dalin Branch

By Pei-ru Jiang

Translated by Rick Chen

As people's average age climbs and birth rate drops, an aging society has become a serious problem for Taiwan, even the world to face. According to the Census statistic of fiscal year 2005, there are 2,2106,804 people over age of 65, which is 9.7% of the entire population. What makes it more interesting is that the number of people older than 100 years old has exceed 1,743, which means it is not uncommon to be over 100 years old.

In addition, 14 percent of the local population, more than 180,000 people in Yun lin and Ja yi Counties are over age of 65. An aging population has become a reality.

Although Taiwan has officially stepped into the era of an aging society, "Geriatrics" is still unfamiliar to most people.

In order to provide care for the elderly on the aspect of nursery, medical services, health care, leisure and recreation, Tzu Chi Hospital, Dalin branch has planned out a corresponding system, and has set up the Department of Geriatrics in 2003. Not only does this facility maintain a good relationship with local nursing centers, but also reinforced health services to elders within the

community.

"People over age of 65 can be considered as seniors, and the Department of Geriatrics provides basic treatment for the seniors, which encompass services to all degree of illness. Elder medical care is the key to better senior health." said Dr. Kun-wei Tsai from Dalin Branch, Buddhist Tzu Chi General Hospital.

## The Growing Minor Department

"Many people are still confused about the purpose of this department." said Dr. Tsai. Majority of the residents in Taiwan still go to certain department based on which part of their organ might cause the illness. For example, people who have heart problems go straight to cardiology department and joint problems go to the Ophthalmology department. However, with the newly operational department, many seniors have got into the habit of visiting the Department of Senior Medical Care first, which solves the problem of not knowing which specific department to visit.

It is usually more complicated to determine and heal illness relevant to aging. Therefore, the doctors in the Department of Senior Medical Care have to go through special training to specialize in services, including daily care, urgent, or long-term care for the elders. In most cases, the doctors within the department are able to handle the problem. For those cases that they were not able to resolve, they'll turn to specialty doctors

Dr. Tsai also points out that many elders lack the knowledge of their health conditions, and are usually misled by some unprofessional suggestions or incorrect subscriptions. This in turn delays the treatment time and waste the resources within the society.

### **U.S. Starts to Emphasize on Geriatrics of Family Medicine**

Dr. Tsai took his residency training in Chicago after graduated from Medical School in Taiwan. When he was debating whether to peruse a sub-specialty or keep his original focus on internal medicine, his family suggested to open his own business. Hence he relinquished the dream of perusing further expertise and built his own clinic to serve the community.

Although there is more freedom being a self-employed doctor, however, Dr. Tsai faces more liabilities. Dr. Tsai said that most of the US citizens choose the local clinics over the hospitals. Back then, his clinic is only 20 minutes away from nearby hospitals. Whenever he received a call from the hospital,

he would immediately drive to the hospital to serve his patients. There was one time he had to run around to three different hospitals. When bad weather condition hit, he had to clean up the snow before he left the clinic. Therefore, he was always busy regardless of the number of patients he had.

US Government gradually took the seniors' medical care issue more seriously, and start to publicize the importance of this special need. This was also the time Dr. Tsai decided to pursue his sub-specialty again. After passing the specialty qualification for Geriatrics, Dr. Tsai continued to serve local



**Dr. Tsai, who is specialized in senior medical care, comes back to Tzu Chi Dalin Hospital to continue his professional life.**



The patience and care from the medical staffs enlightens the elders' life in the hospital.

patients, but also assisted the local hospital as a trainer for the medical students. Beginning of 2003, Dr. Tsai terminated his over twenty years of medical practice in US. “I take it as if I’m retired, and return to my homeland.” Dr. Tsai said. After taking care of his patients’ clinic relocation, he flew back to Taiwan and worked for a hospital in the suburb -- Dalin. He says, “The environment is really nice, and it’s a great place to live.” Besides the great nature scenery, it is also a friendly village. Due to its nature of grand senior population, Dr. Tsai decided to stay at “the hospital in the middle of a field” to continue his service for the elders.

### **To Enhance Efficiency on Medical Resources**

Geriatrics Department reduces elder’s consumption on medical resources by having seniors visit one doctor instead of consulting various specialists for each symptom.

Dr. Tsai indicated US medical insurance states that the patient must go through the family doctor before going to a specialized department. The specialized doctor does not accept appointments before receiving a reference from the family doctor to avoid the waste of medicine, and an excess

subscription to patients.

### **The Importance of “DNR”**

As people grow older, it's inevitable to face death. Dr. Tsai said that in traditional notion, if one's relative refuses resuscitation on the patient, they're considered as having no filial piety. However, what they did not realize is that the existence of live support system, though, extends the patient's life, increase the suffering one has to go through. Many patients want to unplug the tube due to extreme pain, but prevented by medical staff most of the time. Relatively, the family members go through a tremendous amount of suffering as well as diminishing society's medical resources. If the family considers various aspects, “Do Not Resuscitate” agreement(DNR) can perhaps be the best gift for their family members.

Current patient in ward 7A of Dalin Branch mostly come from private nursing houses. Dr. Tsai said that most of them have already lost consciousness, but the families still wouldn't make a decision or even mention the “DNR” Agreement, which has created an unpleasant chain reaction. Many patients after resuscitated were sent to the emergency room, then to the ward. However, whenever an emergency takes place, caregiver can't make on his or her own decision, hence the patient is back to the urgent care and then sends to regular ward for recovery when the condition becomes steady.

Dr. Tsai said that such painful cycle can be eliminated by frequent communication

between the family members and the doctors. “When an emergency happens, whether to insert tubes, or apply electrical shocks” are the unavoidable topics between the doctors and the family members, and at the same time, the family members can take the fact that the condition is worse than it was before the emergency. Currently, over half of the patients' families in ward 7A have signed the “DNR” Agreement. However, they can still choose to have resuscitation anytime they wish even after they signed the agreement.

### **Medical Teams Corporation**

Although Geriatrics department can cover most of the medical areas, it still lacks the ability to provide a cohesive examination for the elders' complete health condition. Hence it's prominent for other departments such as Rehabilitation, pharmaceutical, Nurses, and community medical department to solve the elders' problem together. Problems such as multiple use of medication, inconvenience on transportation and living alone particularly needs caregiver's attention, and rehabilitator can assist seniors with physical disabilities. Group activities within the community encourage elders to open themselves up instead of closed up in their world.

Working as a team, Geriatrics department and other departments enhanced senior's physical and spiritual wellness, as well as stabilized their life toward their later years in life. Our goal is not merely to help seniors striving for an elongated life, but having a higher standard living quality and earn respect. 