

Call via Internet
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A gift from above

An interview with Dr Chung-ping Yu

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“Twinkle twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are. Up above the sky so high, like a diamond in the sky...” To many baby orphans born with birth defects at an orphanage in Suzhou, China, the neurosurgery service provided by Dr Chung-ping Yu from Hong Kong and the medical team at Suzhou University Children Hospital are tantamount to “diamonds in the sky” in the popular nursery rhyme—sparkling, warm, caring while also demonstrating a ray of hope for the underprivileged.

In the past decade the founder and director of MedArt, Dr Yu, and the voluntary group have performed more than 200 operations on orphan babies with neural tube defects. The high demand for surgical repairs at The First Affiliated Hospital of Suzhou University means that Dr Yu has to make monthly trips to Suzhou, amid his hectic schedule in Hong Kong. Nonetheless the neurosurgeon feels obliged to serve and has described his involvement in voluntary work as “a gift from above”.

“Being able to serve is more a privilege than a burden. Engaging in community service, to me, is a duty, a call from above that I will respond without any doubts,” he noted, citing the selfless sacrifice of Mother Teresa as a role model.

He once travelled to Albania to visit her grave and admires Mother Teresa for devoting her life to

servicing beyond her home country.

The charity adventure of the local neurosurgeon also happened outside Hong Kong and originated from an unsolicited email from an orphanage in Suzhou years ago. “At that time they were desperately looking for neurosurgeons to help and had sent emails worldwide soliciting support. Despite the fact that I was not trained in specialist paediatric neurosurgery, I still decided to help as I found the service motto of the orphanage very meaningful: it encourages people to help in whatever way we can,” Dr Yu said.

Notwithstanding that each and every one of us has our own limitations, the charity experience has inspired Dr Yu to believe that we can always try to acquire new skills and overcome challenges. “Honestly, I did not have much experience in performing surgery on infants at the beginning but now I have become an expert in the field.”

Over the past years, Dr Yu has treated infants born with various types of neural tube defects, handling complicated cases such as babies suffering from ‘lipomyelomeningocele’.

With faith to serve, Dr Yu has overcome hurdles in his journey to help the Chinese orphans—undeterred by constraints in resources and facilities where he serves.

Intuition and the ability to improvise are probably a key to success. “I remember that we once had an endotracheal tube falling out during an operation and that was how we came up with the idea of suturing it to the chin,” Dr Yu recalled.

To perform surgery on tiny infants poses another challenge. “We have to insert Foley catheter with the aid of microscope.” But with full collaboration and staunch support from the team, Dr Yu has achieved high success rates with the cases.

“I believe that everyone is equal in receiving quality health care. We should try our best to ensure that our patients receive the best care.” Dr Yu remarked.

Although one cannot change the medical system nor overcome the fact that Chinese babies with body defects may well be abandoned, we can always take the lead to help.

“The most important thing is—never say NO. When you serve, give the best you have.”

Underlying this hard work is the bright smile of the seemingly ‘cool-looking’ surgeon holding the babies he has helped. This is the ‘encouragements’ he has gained from the charity work.

Dr Yu is delighted to see the postoperative babies living in foster homes being well cared for by nannies. Successful operations have also helped increase the chance of babies seeking adoption.

“About 40% of babies treated have been successful in getting adoption by families. In one of the cases, a boy who would have become paralysed without an operation has been adopted by a Swedish family and he can now ski and ride on a bicycle like a normal kid,” said Dr Yu with a satisfying smile.

He encourages others to become involved in charity work. “Everybody has a gift to give. We should make good use of it and pass it on by serving others.”



(Facing page)
The patient of the first call

(Top)
Dr Yu (in the front) and the Suzhou University Children Hospital team

(Upper middle)
The nannies and babies in a foster home

(Lower middle)
Dr Yu enjoys his volunteer work

(Bottom)
(from left) Student reporters: Suki and Christie; Dr Yiu-wah Fan (colleague of Dr Yu), and Dr Chung-ping Yu