Love Keeps the Light of Life Burning

“For one week in Nauru, I learned from this nation and its people the value of life instead of just giving medical services,” said Huang Ye-hung, an intestinal specialist from Changhua County’s Show Chwan Memorial Hospital. “In this place, being sick is a misfortune, seeing a doctor is a luxury, getting cured is a matter of luck, and living a healthy life is a dream.”

This TaiwanICDF Mobile Medical Mission (MMM) was dispatched to Nauru in 2006, in conjunction with Show Chwan. During its short period of medical service, team members saw what a blessing the chance of a healthy life was to locals.

The Republic of Nauru Hospital is the nation’s only hospital, and it looked like “a farmhouse hit hard by a typhoon”, according to one member of the MMM.

There were only three young and inexperienced doctors in the hospital, and there was a serious shortage of computer hardware and software, and even clinical textbooks. The nursing staff did not have the opportunity to improve their medical knowledge, let alone the quality of patient care. Under such conditions, there was little hope of providing patients with proper attention. In a region where even the most common diseases bring the risk of death, most people just pray for good luck.

Seriously ill patients had to be referred to other countries. In 2005 alone, 40 patients were transferred to hospitals in Australia and Fiji, which cost the government NT$10 million, a severe burden on the economy.

Nauru, a small country with a tiny population, was once considered a wealthy nation with a per capita income of US$120,000 per annum. But, after the nation’s only resource, phosphorous, was exhausted, this plunged to US$100. The national airline’s only plane was repossessed due to debts, but with the help of Taiwan, the nation recently purchased a Boeing 737 passenger jet and
renamed its national airline "Our Airline."

Diabetes is the biggest killer of residents of the island. There is a high rate of amputation and mortality, and the average lifespan of citizens is 53.5 years. Still, the MMM was greeted with warmth and passion, and it was very tough to see such lovely people beset by disease and illness.

Meanwhile, Show Chwan signed a cooperative agreement with the Republic of Nauru Hospital, promising to offer more medical aid and improve the standard of medical care in the nation. The medical team tried to make this trip as teaching-oriented as possible. They hoped that the young doctors in the hospital would learn fast enough to assume the responsibility for medical care in Nauru.

While they were teaching the young doctors, members of the MMM felt like they themselves were facing an examination on difficult symptoms because most patients were admitted through the emergency department with conditions that had developed complications. One patient came to the emergency room complaining of chest pain, but his pulse had dropped to 40. The doctor checked the electrocardiogram and immediately diagnosed it as acute myocardial infarction. After emergency treatment, his life was saved.

"We hope that the people of Nauru will gradually regain their health so we can worry less," said Kuo Mei-chau, the team's leader, expressing confidence that, through the services of the TaiwanICDF MMM, and follow-up training and referrals, the conditions of the afflicted would be improved. He added that the love generated by the members’ efforts would stay in the hearts of the people of these two nations forever.