The Best Gift is a Look of Sincere Appreciation

What is happiness? To poor people who yearn for good health and the contentment it brings, it unfortunately often remains a distant dream. If one compares the medical environments of many of the nations of Central and South America to what is available in Taiwan, Taiwanese are living in the lap of luxury, where happiness is taken for granted.

To most people in Taiwan, advanced medical technology, access to medical resources and the protection provided by the national health insurance system have become fundamental to a decent quality of life. The general population does not normally need to worry about whether the incursion of medical expenses will destroy their lives.

In sharp contrast, people in Honduras and Guatemala often need to walk 4-6 hours just to see a doctor and the availability of medicine is never guaranteed. And this is for those that can afford it; if a family has no savings, they must pray they don’t contract chronic diseases such as diabetes, otherwise, their lives will instantly be ruined.

At the end of 2006, a Mobile Medical Mission (MMM) was dispatched for one-month of health care service in Honduras and Guatemala in cooperation with Taipei Medical University Hospital.

While they learn was in Honduras, a woman in her forties came to the clinic with cellulitis. She had had it for more than one month, and was supposed to stay in the hospital to prevent sepsis, but couldn’t even pay the already subsidized fees.

The MMM could only clean her wounds for her, and nephrology physician Lee Yi-chung told her that she would have to return to the hospital if the wounds got worse, otherwise the consequences would be serious. However, as the breadwinner of her family, she said this was not feasible. Regarding her prospects of recuperating, she accepted that “the chance of disappointment was high.”

Although the national hospital in Honduras has 1,000 beds, there are only four intensive-care berths. The quality of medical care trails that of Taiwan by at least 40 years. And even with a national health insurance...
system, medicine is often unavailable in hospitals, so people have to buy it elsewhere. The effectiveness of the generic drugs on offer is also, of course, less than ideal.

Meanwhile, Guatemala has two separate systems for hospitals and pharmacies, but the number of hospitals is rather limited. People must often travel a long way to see a doctor, and this has become one of the biggest expenses of people seeking medical care.

In an effort to reach out to the most needy, the MMM traveled to some of the remotest areas of the two Latin American nations after visiting the national hospitals. Every day, crowds of people lined up to see the doctors. Though members of the team were exhausted, the appreciation in the eyes of their patients was the best remedy for fatigue.

“Our biggest reward came when they gently delivered the words ‘thank you’ after they finished their examinations and received their medicine,” said pharmacist Lin Chien-liang. “They trust the doctors from Taiwan. Sometimes, they hand over a bottle of soda, which is considered very expensive, as a token of thanks for the doctor’s help,” he said. “This gesture warms your heart from the inside out.”

Since their services are only temporary, members of the MMM sometimes felt powerless.

However, the TaiwanICDF continues to deliver medical services and exchanges to its partners in the region in two ways: by providing medical technology and knowledge, and conducting training programs in Taiwan for medical administrators from these countries.

Medical care does not discriminate in terms of race or social status. The essential thing is to protect people from the threat of illness. It is in keeping with this spirit that Taiwan’s MMMe have traveled around the world, spreading the goodwill and love of the nation.