

Health Care
Doctor
Hospital
Pharmacist
Nurse
Dentist
First Aid
Surgeon
Emergency

MEDICAL



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HEALTH FOR ALL

TAIWAN

CAN HELP

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COVER DESIGN BY LIN CHIEN-JU

Published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Republic of China (Taiwan)
2 Ketagalan Blvd., Taipei 10048, Taiwan, ROC
<http://www.mofa.gov.tw>
Catalog Card No.: MOFA-EN-BL-110-001-I-1
First edition, B5 May 2021



Stronger Together

As the international community wrestles with the health, economic and social impacts of COVID-19, Taiwan stands willing and able to share its know-how and resources in strengthening the global response to the pandemic.

This spirit of largesse is undiminished by the fact that the country remains shut out of the activities, mechanisms and meetings of the World Health Organization (WHO). The Geneva-headquartered U.N. specialized agency readily prescribes an inclusive approach to combating coronavirus, except when it comes to Taiwan.

With the 74th edition of the World Health Assembly (WHA)—the decision-making body of the WHO attended by delegations from all of the organization's member states—taking place virtually May 24 to June 1, WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus would be well-advised to put politics to one side and deliver on his organization's goal of achieving Health For All.

There is an inconvenient truth that needs to be faced posthaste by Dr. Tedros and WHO member states prepared to put lives at risk so as to support a blinkered and unrealistic political agenda. Taiwan and its 23.5 million people must be given a voice at the WHA if the WHO is to overcome the pandemic, meet emerging challenges and realize the health objectives of the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The SDGs are an integral part of the U.N.'s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. If the initiative is to succeed in shifting the world onto a resilient path, it is critical no one is left behind. Given Taiwan's extensive front-line experience promoting and providing health care in far-flung corners of the globe, WHA observer status is the best model for the country's meaningful participation in the WHO.

A seat at the WHA table enables Taiwan to better share some of its most effective initiatives such as the Taiwan Model with the family of

nations. The successful approach for managing COVID-19 harnesses the power and synergies of the country's health care system, public and private sectors, citizenry, democracy, technology and deep-seated trust in the government and its policymaking. As of March 2021, Taiwan had recorded less than 1,000 confirmed cases and 10 deaths, earning it widespread international acclaim for anti-pandemic excellence.

WHA involvement would also allow the country to do even more in terms of making sure surgical masks and other personal protective equipment, as well as medical devices and pharmaceuticals, quickly find their way to those who need them most. To date, Taiwan has donated 54 million surgical masks and other anti-pandemic supplies to more than 80 countries—numbers reflecting the compassion and kindness of the people.

Vaccine development is another area in which the country can assist via the WHA. As discussion of related measures adopted by the WHO within the context of public health emergencies preparedness and response is high on the agenda of the assembly, Taiwan can enhance outcomes by applying the professional strengths of its biotechnology, information and communication technology, medical care and R&D sectors.

With 2021 declared International Year of Health and Care Workers by the WHO, it is critically important all relevant stakeholders engage in dialogue to protect those serving selflessly on the coronavirus front lines. A Taiwan-attended WHA is the perfect platform for building a truly global consensus on advocacy, care and solidarity in support of these unsung heroes.

The pandemic has shown the value of an all hands on deck strategy for addressing inequities in achieving sustainable goals spanning health and development. It is time Dr. Tedros and the WHO recognize Taiwan Can Help, and that countries are stronger together when combating COVID-19. ■

Health News

MOFA welcomes launch of Taiwan-Palau travel bubble following visit by President Whipps Jr.

The launch of a travel bubble between Taiwan and Palau is testament to the two countries' long-standing friendship, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) March 30. In a statement released to mark the opening of the bubble alongside an official visit to Taiwan by the Pacific ally's President Surangel Whipps Jr. and a delegation including U.S. Ambassador to Palau John Hennessey-Niland, the MOFA said Taiwan and the U.S. have provided Palau with essential supplies and equipment as well as technical assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Taiwan, Palau and the U.S. are committed to promoting democracy and advancing peace and prosperity across the region, the ministry said. The government will continue to maintain and expand trilateral ties on the basis of shared values and common interests while collaborating in areas including climate change, digital health, women's empowerment, agricultural trade, coast guard cooperation and cybersecurity to achieve a free and open Indo-Pacific, it added.



Taiwan attends US-organized virtual, pledges help combating Ebola



Taiwan participated in the "Strengthening Africa's Resilience and Response to Ebola Virus" virtual March 26, pledging US\$250,000 to help combat the disease while promoting global health. Hosted by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, West African Health Organization, the U.S. and the World Health Organization's (WHO) regional office for Africa, the virtual was held in response to recent outbreaks of Ebola in western and central Africa. Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the U.S. head Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭美琴), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) Department of North American Affairs Director-

General Douglas Yu-tien Hsu (徐佑典) and Taiwan Centers for Disease Control Director-General Chou Jih-haw (周志浩) took part via videoconference alongside officials from Africa and the European Union, as well as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. According to the MOFA, Taiwan remains committed to substantial participation in the global health system in the spirit of pragmatism, professionalism and a willingness to abide by international health standards. Cooperation between nations has proven to be the only way to successfully tackle epidemics, and the country has much to offer with its expertise in disease prevention, the ministry added.

Taiwan, Czech Republic stage COVID-19 webinar

A webinar on COVID-19 management was jointly staged March 24 by Taiwan and the Czech Republic, underscoring the commitment of the two like-minded partners to deepening health-related cooperation. Presided over by Liang Kung-ye (梁廣義), president of Taiwan's National Health Research Institutes, and Czech Senator Jiri Drahos, the event saw health officials and experts from both sides shed light on their respective medical research, disease-management policy and progress in vaccine development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) said March 25. According to the MOFA, Drahos expressed gratitude for Taiwan's donations of supplies such as surgical masks, respirators and mask-producing equipment. He also praised the government's success in containing the spread of coronavirus, saying that Taiwan's related policymaking and clinical practices are great models.



Taiwan, India unveil smart pandemic prevention system



Taiwan and India unveiled a jointly developed smart pandemic prevention system March 24 via videoconference, spotlighting the like-minded partners' commitment to advancing disease-fighting technology. In consultation with the Ministry of Science and Technology, Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in India, researchers from National Chung Cheng University (NCCU) in southern Taiwan's Chiayi County and Sri Ramaswamy Memorial University in southern India's Tamil Nadu state fine-tuned the system featuring real-time contact tracing, facial recognition and thermal body temperature monitoring. According to NCCU's Taiwan-India Joint Research Center on Artificial Intelligence, the system demonstrates that Taiwan Can Help strengthen the New Southbound Policy (NSP) target country's response to COVID-19. A key plank in the government's national development strategy, the NSP seeks to deepen Taiwan's agricultural, business, cultural, education, tourism and trade ties with the 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states, six South Asian countries, Australia and New Zealand.

Taiwan cancer drug delivery system receives US FDA approval for trials

A first-in-class cancer drug delivery system developed by the National Health Research Institutes (NHRI) has received approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)



to begin phase one clinical trials, according to the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA) March 15. The NHRI said DBPR115 is the first homegrown small molecule drug delivery system, adding that it allows for more accurate delivery of therapies to tumor cells and can effectively inhibit growth of colon, rectal and pancreatic cancers with only 20 percent of the dosage of traditional cancer drugs.

Foreign Minister Wu launches Taiwan Can Help mask-production line for Czech Republic

Minister of Foreign Affairs Jaushieh Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) took part in the virtual ribbon-cutting ceremony March 11 from Taipei City for a mask-production



line donated by Taiwan to the Czech Republic. Connected with Czech Senate President Milos Vystrel via video link, Wu said the donation underscored the robust relationship between the like-minded partners and their joint commitment to fighting COVID-19. According to the minister, the restructuring of global supply chains prompted by coronavirus highlights Taiwan's role as a reliable trade partner to the world. The success of the Taiwan Model also proves that democracy is the best approach to managing pandemics and crises, he said.

Taiwan donates COVID-19 medical supplies to France



Taiwan has sent a large donation of medical supplies to France to assist the European country in combating COVID-19, spotlighting the government's commitment to strengthening the global response to the pandemic, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) March 18. Facilitated by the MOFA, Taoyuan City Government and French Office in Taipei in collaboration with northern Taiwan-based East Field Corp., Hsiner Co. and Union Biomedical Tech Co., the donation comprises continuous positive airway pressure masks, disinfectant sprays and surgical masks. The items are to be distributed to Colmar in northeastern France and branches of the French Red Cross to help front-line health workers tackling the disease.

President Tsai lauds Taiwan's contributions toward development of TCM

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) lauded the contributions of Taiwan's practitioners and researchers in the field of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) March 14, spotlighting how the country's medical community are embracing the Taiwan Can Help spirit to safeguard global health and well-being. TCM professionals in Taiwan have been at the forefront of creating a combined East-meets-West approach to treating COVID-19 ever since the disease first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019, Tsai said. The successful launch of NRICM101, an herbal co-treatment for patients infected with coronavirus developed by Taipei City-based National Research Institute of Chinese Medicine, has further raised the country's profile in this regard, she added. Tsai made the remarks while attending the opening ceremony of the 13th Taipei Traditional Chinese Medicine International Forum in northern Taiwan.



Taipei Medical University Hospital lauded for combating COVID-19 in Kingdom of Eswatini



The Advanced Taiwan We Go Team from Taipei Medical University Hospital (TMUH) successfully combated coronavirus in the Kingdom of Eswatini and strengthened the global response to the pandemic, according to Foreign Minister Jaushieh Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) March 11. Altruistic acts and services of the team demonstrated the depth of Taiwan's friendship to Eswatini, as well as the passion and expertise of the country's medical professionals, Wu said. These contributions greatly benefited the health and well-being of the people in the Africa ally, he added. Wu made the remarks while receiving members of the team and TMUH officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Taipei City.

Taiwan donates COVID-19 PPE to Eswatini, St. Lucia, Somaliland

A large-scale donation of COVID-19 personal protective equipment (PPE) for Taiwan's Africa ally Kingdom of Eswatini, Caribbean ally St. Lucia and Horn of Africa partner Somaliland was announced Feb. 20 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Facilitated by the MOFA in collaboration with Hsinchu City-headquartered TSMC Charity Foundation—affiliated with Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC)—and Taipei City-based Medtecs Group, the donation comprises 150,000 surgical masks, 11,000 isolation gowns, 7,000 coveralls, 6,000 head covers, 6,000 shoe covers and 1,500 hazmat suits. The items are to be distributed to government agencies, health care facilities and the underprivileged. According to the MOFA, the generosity of TSMC and Medtecs is sincerely appreciated, and reflects the compassion of the government and people. It also underscores a commitment to expanding the country's global participation while showing Taiwan Can Help realize the World Health Organization's goal of Health For All.



Taiwan's success in managing COVID-19 praised by IHF

Taiwan's success in combating COVID-19 was praised by Geneva-headquartered International Hospital Federation (IHF) in a recently released report offering insights into how medical facilities can deliver transformative health care solutions amid the coronavirus pandemic. Dr. Lee Po-chang (李伯璋), director-general of the National Health Insurance Administration (NHIA) under the Ministry of Health and Welfare, said the IHF's recognition in "Building the New Normal: Harnessing Transformative Practices from the COVID-19 Pandemic" is testament to the success of the Taiwan Model. It also underscores the country's commitment to advancing global health as part of efforts to meaningfully participate in the World Health Organization (WHO), Lee said. Taiwan will continue to share its NHI system and experiences with the international community in an attempt to achieve the WHO's goal of universal health coverage, he added.



Tsai highlights Taiwan's contribution to advancing medical human rights

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) said Dec. 12 that Taiwan Can Help strengthen the global response to COVID-19 while advancing medical human rights in the international community. Taiwan's proficiency in managing epidemics can be attributed to past experience, swift action, professional officials led by Health Minister Chen Shih-chung (陳時中), the use of innovative technology, domestic mask manufacturers and front-line medical staff working around the clock, Tsai said. This is complemented by factors such as the country's resilience and unity, Tsai said, adding that Taiwan is committed to protecting the health of its people, as well as contributing more to the global community. Tsai made the remarks during the launch of "Beating COVID-19, Taiwan" produced by local outfit Sanlih E-Television and Discovery Channel.



Taiwan participates in SICA forum promoting post-pandemic economic recovery

Taiwan participated in a Central American Integration System (SICA) forum aimed at advancing post-pandemic economic recovery throughout the region, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Staged virtually Nov. 18-20, the event involved nearly 1,000 academics, experts and officials from SICA member states such as ROC (Taiwan) allies Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, as well as the Central American Bank for Economic Integration and Inter-American Development Bank.

Taiwan reiterates commitment to bolstering global post-pandemic economic recovery at APEC



Taiwan is committed to strengthening the global response to COVID-19 while promoting open trade and investment amid the pandemic, according to Minister without Portfolio Deng Chen-chung (鄧振中) Nov. 16. Deng, who heads the Cabinet-level Office of Trade Negotiations, said the country's successful coronavirus response measures have played a vital role in maintaining free trade and circulation of key supplies. He called on the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to continue expanding cooperation and exchanges among member economies during this challenging time. According to Deng, the government will work with other APEC members to address the needs of enterprises worldwide through digital technology and a people-oriented approach aimed at liberalizing trade and investment. Deng made the comments during the 31st APEC Ministerial Meeting in Malaysia, which he attended alongside National Development Council Minister Kung Ming-hsin (龔明鑫).

MOFA thankful for unprecedented global backing of Taiwan's WHA bid

Unprecedented support from like-minded partners around the world for Taiwan's participation as an observer at the World Health Assembly (WHA) is sincerely appreciated by the government and people, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) said Nov. 14. During a virtual WHA meeting in May, 14 of the country's allies urged the World Health Organization (WHO) to invite Taiwan as an observer to its decision-making body, the MOFA said. The matter was raised once more at the second meeting Nov. 9-13 in Geneva, with representatives from Japan, the U.S. and other countries also voicing their support, it added. The sentiment was shared by U.S. Mission in Geneva Ambassador Andrew Bremberg in a recently released three-minute video, in which he urged WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus to restore the status quo from 2009 to 2016 by inviting Taiwan to take part in the WHA. Taiwan's WHA campaign has received support from other prominent political figures around the world, the MOFA said. These include U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo; Australia Prime Minister Scott Morrison; New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern; Japan's former PM Shinzo Abe; and foreign ministers and deputy ministers of Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the U.K.



Photos: Huang Chung-hsin, Liberty Times, National Chung Cheng University, National Development Council, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Presidential Office and United Daily News



First Line of Defense

Minister of Health and Welfare Chen Shih-chung (陳時中) discusses the government's efforts to protect and support health workers amid the COVID-19 pandemic.



01. Protecting and supporting health care workers is an integral part of the Taiwan Model for combating COVID-19.
02. Minister of Health and Welfare Chen Shih-chung calls for the world to give stronger support to Taiwan's bid to participate in the World Health Organization and related activities.

01. Courtesy of Ministry of Health and Welfare Facebook
02. Photo by Lin Min-hsuan

The Taiwan Model for managing coronavirus has received recognition from governments and organizations around the world. How does it protect front-line health workers critical to the country's disease-prevention efforts?

Chen Shih-chung: The Ministry of Health and Welfare [MOHW] moved rapidly to safeguard Taiwan's health workers, promulgating guidelines for medical facilities designated to treat COVID-19 patients before the first case was identified in the country on Jan. 21, 2020. Since then guidelines have been constantly updated to reflect circumstances on the ground. Protective measures range from installing temperature screening stations at hospital entrances to proper procedure for donning personal protective equipment, effectively reducing infection risk to a minimum for staff and visitors.

At the end of January last year, the government took the further step of requisitioning materials like surgical masks, disinfectants and protective clothing from manufacturers and established a distribution mechanism reaching hospitals countrywide. Thanks to this efficient system, Taiwan's front-line health workers have never been placed in a situation where they had to fight

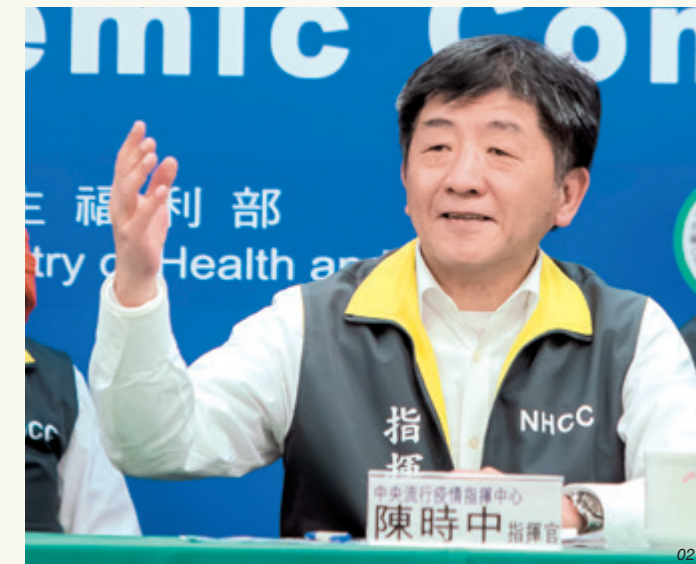
COVID-19 with insufficient protection.

The World Health Organization [WHO] has designated 2021 as the International Year of Health and Care Workers. What has the government done to show its appreciation and support to medical personnel helping combat COVID-19?

Chen: One major way we've shown our appreciation is by ensuring ample financial compensation. Physicians and nurses caring for confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases are each granted NT\$10,000 [US\$351] per day, while staff at COVID-19 sample collection sites set up by 205 hospitals around Taiwan can each receive NT\$700 [US\$25] per case handled.

Additional funds are allocated to medical facilities to support continued quality services amid the pandemic. All 488 hospitals in the country can receive up to NT\$5 million [US\$175,438] and all private clinics and public health centers, which number more than 20,000, are entitled to up to NT\$130,000 [US\$4,561]. A portion of the money must go to individuals involved in daily operation of the medical facilities, from emergency physicians to custodians.

The MOHW has also eased pressure on health care workers during the pandemic by postponing license renewals as of January last year. In normal times, all professionals in the medical sector must renew their qualifications every six years by completing further training.



Additionally, we have temporarily suspended the regular practice of evaluating hospital performance to allow health workers to concentrate their energy on battling the disease.

How has the government worked to boost health workers' morale during these challenging times?

Chen: For starters, the MOHW takes the issue of excessive workloads incredibly seriously. In 2017 the ministry announced guidelines for setting up reasonable shift schedules and opened an online platform the following year to provide a portal for reporting work-related complaints anonymously. Submitted grievances are referred to local governments, which send officials to the affected workplace to view the situation firsthand and resolve concerns.

Furthermore, Taiwan's National Health Insurance [NHI] premiums, which are set as a proportion of an individual's income, have been raised from 4.69 to 5.17 percent as of Jan. 1. This revision is expected to enhance the quality of medical

services and boost pay for health care workers.

With dedicated health workers, solid government policies and a cooperative general public, Taiwan has implemented an extremely successful COVID-19 management strategy. Despite this, the country is still shut out of the activities, mechanisms and meetings of the WHO. Is this fair?

Chen: Taiwan has kept COVID-19 under

control within its borders, which has allowed its people largely to go about their lives as usual during the pandemic. Nevertheless, the country has been constantly denied participation in the WHO for political reasons, creating a serious gap in the global epidemic prevention network and threatening worldwide health security. Taiwan has continued to do its part by providing medical equipment and materials to countries in urgent need and holding international videoconferences to share the Taiwan Model for combating COVID-19.

We call for the world to voice stronger support for Taiwan's participation in the WHO and all related activities. Only then can we fully share with the world valuable health care experience such as our epidemic prevention measures and highly successful NHI program. Taiwan Can Help the international community realize the WHO's vision of health as a fundamental human right and the U.N.'s promise to Leave No One Behind as part of its Sustainable Development Goals. ■

—interview by Oscar Chung



High-Tech Health

*Ministry of Health and Welfare's Department of Information Management
Director-General Parng I-ming (龐一鳴) sits down to talk about the role information
and communication technology plays in the Taiwan Model of epidemic prevention.*



Parng I-ming, director-general of the Ministry of Health and Welfare's Department of Information Management, explains how information and communication technology is critical to Taiwan's COVID-19 management strategy.

Photo by Chen Mei-ling

Information and communication technology [ICT] has played a pivotal role in the Taiwan Model. How has it been used in the country's COVID-19 response?

Parng I-ming: At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, very little was known about the coronavirus and its implications. All we knew was that the outbreak was first reported in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019.

As there was no vaccine at that time, we adopted the basic principles of infectious disease prevention to combat the disease. We implemented strict face mask, social distancing and quarantine policies to reduce potential exposure to the coronavirus. All these systems relied on the use of ICT.

To prevent panic buying of face masks and ensure equitable access for all residents, the government assembled new production lines to meet domestic demand and launched a name-based mask distribution system utilizing the National Health Insurance [NHI] database to provide a low-cost, guaranteed number of masks to each individual every two weeks.

As the outbreak originated overseas, we quickly enforced strict

border control and quarantine measures. The NHI system was adapted to keep track of individuals' travel histories by integrating the NHI database with data from the National Immigration Agency [NIA].

Looking at other countries, we noted that COVID-19 spreads rapidly. It is important to prevent community transmission where the source of the disease is unclear. This kind of a situation can easily spiral out of control and lead to the health care system buckling under strain from a large influx of patients. That is why we flagged individuals with a history of travel to areas affected by COVID-19 using the NHI MediCloud system.

Contact history and occupation were also included in the data to allow health care staffers to obtain first-hand information concerning a patient's history of travel, occupation, contact, and cluster [TOCC].

In February 2020, we launched the quarantine system for entry to optimize quarantine capacity and speed up the immigration clearance process. Travelers with smartphones can log in to the system before departure or upon arrival in Taiwan and fill out a form providing personal contact information, health status and travel history in order to receive a health declaration pass that can be presented at immigration for clearance.

The information collected is shared with the centralized epidemic prevention tracking system to facilitate follow-up measures. At-risk individuals placed under home isolation and quarantine are then contacted by local civil and public health officers either via telephone or in person.

The electronic fence system is implemented in compliance with the

Personal Data Protection Act and aids home isolation and quarantine by sending an alert to local civil, public health and police officials to follow up on the person's whereabouts when necessary.

We have also developed a chat bot in the instant messaging software Line called the Disease Containment Expert to allow individuals under home isolation and quarantine to voluntarily report their health statuses to the competent authority on a daily basis while providing relevant disease prevention information. In addition, it can list numbers for services such as food delivery, garbage disposal and medical assistance during the quarantine period.

What has made the Taiwan Model so successful in its efforts to utilize ICT?

Parng: Taiwan's NHI system is well developed and deeply embedded into public health infrastructure, so it played a vital role in our coronavirus response. All citizens and eligible foreign residents are enrolled in the program and have an NHI card.

Insured individuals use the card when seeking medical attention—through this health care providers can access the MediCloud system that stores patient information, including examination, discharge, medication and surgery records. During the pandemic, we added patients' history of TOCC to the system, which facilitates case identification and implementation of subsequent measures.

The NHI also contributed to the success of the name-based mask distribution system, and effective integration of the NHI and NIA databases assisted our disease prevention efforts by tracking travel history.

What measures are being taken to protect personal privacy and prevent infringement of individual rights when utilizing technology as part of the Taiwan Model?

Parng: The government has worked tirelessly to make the disease prevention system, including all use of ICT and collection of personal data, as transparent as possible. In accordance with the Personal Data Protection Act, all government agencies are required to inform individuals when collecting their personal information.

Data collected and shared in the centralized epidemic prevention tracking system can only be retained for 28 days and must be deleted after that time. It cannot be used for any purposes other than investigations into COVID-19 outbreaks.

How has the Taiwan Model helped realize the World Health Organization's goal of Health For All?

Parng: So far, Taiwan has donated critical medical supplies and personal protective equipment to over 80 countries around the world, including in Africa, the Asia-Pacific, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, North America, Southeast Asia and West Asia. In addition, we have shared the source code of our quarantine system for entry with nine allies, namely Belize, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. We have also shared our epidemic prevention experience during virtual conferences with a number of countries including fellow Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation member economies, Belgium, the Czech Republic, India and Switzerland. ■

—interview by Donna Lee



Never Give Up

Taiwan Can Help realize Health For All by combating COVID-19 while providing top-notch health care to those in need around the globe.

BY MEG CHANG

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAICHUNG VETERANS GENERAL HOSPITAL



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01. Dr. Huang Fang-liang, right, gives a high-five to Ng Zi-heng as his father looks on Feb. 8 at Taichung Veterans General Hospital.

02. Zi-heng receives medical attention from staffers at TVGH.

As the world keeps grappling with the impact of coronavirus, Taiwan is maintaining a relative sense of calm and normality while continuing to offer critical medical care to those with special needs from around the globe.

An inspiring example demonstrating how Taiwan Can Help realize the World Health Organization's goal of Health for All amid COVID-19 is the story of Ng Zi-heng—a 22-month-old toddler from New Southbound Policy (NSP) target country Malaysia who received life-saving treatment a year ago at Taichung Veterans General Hospital (TVGH) in central Taiwan.

The NSP is a key plank in the government's national development strategy. It aims to enhance Taiwan's agricultural, business, cultural, education, tourism and trade ties with the 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states, six South Asian countries, Australia and New Zealand.

At six weeks, Zi-heng's parents noticed a loss of appetite and lump near his stomach. Diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia by a hospital in Kuala Lumpur, the baby

received several rounds of chemotherapy to no avail, with repeated infections further compromising his condition.

To complicate matters, Zi-heng's elder brother was unsuitable as a bone marrow donor. Mother Jessica Lim said the hospital told the couple to prepare for the worst as the infant's chances of survival were only 10 to 20 percent. "It was devastating, but we had to do everything we could to give our baby a chance."

In addition to seeking help in Singapore and the U.S., Lim asked her sister—who lives in Taichung—if there was the possibility of redress under Taiwan's world class health care system. Zi-heng's case was ultimately referred to Dr. Huang Fang-liang (黄芳亮), director of the Department of Pediatric Hematology and Oncology at TVGH.

"Zi-heng was a severe case, and while he was only 4 months old at the time, there was still hope that we could save him," Huang said.

As Huang was the only pediatrician who responded to the family's request for assistance, Zi-heng's parents believed TVGH was his one chance of salvation. But the medical expenses and logistics proved a near-insurmountable challenge.

Quick to step into the breach was One Hope Charity, a nonprofit based in the Malaysian city of Bukit Mertajam. More than NT\$5 million (US\$175,439) was raised for Zi-heng within days, which helped the Ng family relocate to Taiwan in November 2019.

When the family first met Huang, he told them he would not give up until all options were exhausted, Lim said. "I knew at that moment that coming to Taiwan was the right decision," she said, adding



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that this made it easier to commit to renting an apartment close to the hospital and spending the next year caring for the infant.

According to Huang, blood tests showed Zi-heng's leukocyte count was 85 times higher than average. But the baby also had a mutation in the KMT2A gene, implying a rather pessimistic prognosis for the disease. "We explained to the parents that there were great challenges ahead, and matters needed to be taken one step at a time," he said.

Three chemotherapy sessions later under the expert and watchful eye of Huang and his team, the cancer cells in Zi-heng were eliminated. Therapy-induced infections were also properly managed courtesy of TVGH personnel. More good news came when the hospital identified an exact match for umbilical hematopoietic stem cells, and proceeded with a much-needed transplant March 31, 2020.

But it was not all smooth sailing. Zi-heng developed postoperative hepatic vein obstruction, a rare but

potentially fatal complication causing him to experience bouts of abdominal distention, hydroperitoneum and jaundice.

"We had to give Zi-heng injections of a special medication and performed daily ascites puncture for his condition," Huang said. "He was so brave, and the whole team could not have been prouder of him."

Zi-heng, hospitalized for 80-plus days after the transplant, was discharged from hospital in June 2020. "We con-

tinued to follow up on him through hospital visits for six months and performed three additional tests to confirm there were no cancer cells in his body," Huang said, adding that today, the toddler is no longer on medication.

Although Zi-heng's treatment at TVGH ended, the family opted to stay in Taiwan for several more months given the country's success in combating coronavirus.

Lim said it had been an incredible year for all of them. "There were so many times when I felt Zi-heng might not make it; words cannot describe my gratitude to Taiwan." The Ngs have since moved back to Malaysia, where Zi-heng has his condition monitored at a local hospital.

According to Huang, it was destiny that brought Zi-heng to TVGH. "His parents never gave up on him," he said, adding that playing a part in his recovery was a deeply personal and satisfying experience. "Nothing is more rewarding than putting the smile back on your patient's face." ■



No One Left Behind

Taiwan honors its commitment to assist those facing health challenges in countries around the world.



01. Taipei Medical University Hospital, Kingdom of Eswatini, 2019
02. Chung Shan Medical University Hospital, Tuvalu, 2019

01. Courtesy of Taipei Medical University Hospital
02. Courtesy of Chung Shan Medical University Hospital

For nearly six decades, Taiwan has been providing medical and public health assistance to allies and partner countries. Under the auspices of state-backed International Cooperation and Development Fund (Taiwan ICDF), hospitals and nongovernmental organizations, aid is delivered via collaborative projects, donations and medical missions.

Although border controls implemented since the COVID-19 pandemic have prevented most traveling, Taiwan professionals are continuing to make vital contributions abroad. Specialists from Taipei Medical University Hospital stationed in the Kingdom of Eswatini; Taichung City-based Chung Shan Medical University Hospital, Tuvalu; and Taipei City-based Shin Kong Wu Ho-Su Memorial Hospital, Palau, have coordinated with government agencies, hospitals and schools on long-term programs to help elevate the quality of the allies' health care systems.

In addition to these activities overseen by individual medical institutions, many initiatives are provided by Taiwan International Healthcare Training Center. Established by the Ministry of Health and Welfare at Taipei Hospital in 2002, the center has provided clinical training to more than 1,800 health professionals from 72 countries.

Undeterred by the pandemic, Taiwan continues to help realize the World Health Organization's goal of Health For All. ■

—by Jim Hwang





01



02



03



04



05

- 01. Taiwan International Healthcare Training Center, Taipei Hospital, 2021
- 02. International Cooperation and Development Fund (TaiwanICDF), Guatemala, 2020
- 03. CSMUH, Tuvalu, 2020
- 04. TMUH, Eswatini, 2019
- 05. TMUH, Eswatini, 2020

01. Courtesy of Taipei Hospital
02. Courtesy of International Cooperation and Development Fund
03. Courtesy of CSMUH
04 & 05. Courtesy of TMUH



01



03



02

01. TMUH, Eswatini, 2020
02. TMUH, Eswatini, 2019
03. CSMUH, Tuvalu, 2020

01 & 02. Courtesy of TMUH
03. Courtesy of CSMUH

**Health
for All**



Taiwan

Can Help



The Gift of a Great Adventure