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Nursing wounds and hearts

For Matron Fu Choon Kee, a nurse's job is to put the smile back on her patient's face



Florence Nightingale, the mother of modern nursing, once said: "How very little can be done under the spirit of fear."

Well, Matron Fu Choon Kee has certainly proven this to be true.

Anyone who has met or known her would certainly testify that this Head Matron for Sarawak is one gutsy, determined petite lady.

She is especially revered for her work with HIV and AIDS patients and has rightfully earned several awards for her selfless contribution to society with her creatively unconventional approaches.

Close to retirement, Matron Fu is far from losing steam, and to her, each day means an opportunity to touch someone's life.

The Star had the privilege of talking to this exemplary figure on what nursing means to her and the changes the profession had seen through the years.

Q: Nurses are very much in demand. How do you view the profession?

A: Nursing boils down to commitment. If you are there for the patients, the needy who needs your help, you will want to take up this profession. Everyday is a learning process and if you don't know, you ask. It is all about finding a better way to help a patient. Being in that position where people depend on you, so why don't you help? It is a profession full of integrity.

So it doesn't mean working a shift and calling it a day?

No, no. You have to be able to work beyond than just coming in for shifts. A healthcare worker dedicates herself to helping the needy and there's no end to that. In life for that matter, the journey is never a smooth one. You need to do extra in order to get to greater heights.

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How do you see the new batches of nurses today? Are they driven by the profession itself or are they just in it to be in the civil service?

I can't speak for all. There will be some who come in with intentions and this happens in all professions. Some come in because of money and some because of passion. But I still believe that if you are in the line, it could be that you were not really interested in nursing at first. Then, as you go on, you will see what you can do to make things better for someone.

You tend to realise how lucky you are because you are not sick like the patients you are looking after. We are certainly not as unfortunate as these patients who are ill. Besides, we have a job to do. So, since you're in the line, do your best. Nursing is greatly respected so take it beyond.

It is not about asking for pay-backs. Government is already paying us the salary. Your money is from the *rakyat*. To me, if I put a smile on my patient's face, it's worth it all.

If I get a pat on the back from my superiors, I can die with a smile on my face. I'm lucky so far that I have good bosses. But having said that, I don't carry out my job to please my bosses. I'm a nurse and that means I am here to help patients.

What's the difference between the profession now and that of the past? Is technology making things easier?

I think the training curriculum we have has brought great changes. In those days, we came in skill-orientated. Nowadays, many demand degree and people go for paper credentials more. Which is why the mentor-mentee system which we have is very important. And I emphasise on this. I always tell the seniors that these young nurses are already in our family, if we are not

going to train them, it will show on us if they make mistakes. Because of this, on Saturdays I still go to the hospital, test them on the spot and if they don't know I teach them right away. I don't believe in scolding.

I've seen male nurses in the hospital. They were rare in the past. Do we have many of them nowadays?

Looking at the hospitals overseas,

male nurses are in great demand. They are good in pre-hospital care, in orthopedic unit, accident and emergency unit or operation theatres. They have more strength and they help the female nurses lift those who are bed-ridden. They can attend to the male patients better too. Yes, female nurses can do this too but sometimes male patients react better to male nurses. There are barriers of course, even though nurses have seen all they need to see already (laughing). But, we don't get many male nurses still. We are hoping to because it is good to get that balance.

Any challenges dealing with male nurses compared to female ones?

Well, it's mostly the male ego. Some tend to think that they should be giving the command instead. Some refuse to be hands-on. I always tell my male students to change their mindset. If the female nurses need you to do something, then you do it. Equal is the word here. There is nobody "more equal" than others in this field.

Now that you are the head matron in Sarawak, what is your action plan for the future?

I want to reduce complaints. Those mistakes that we did, I really want to reduce them to zero. I also want my nurses to be committed so no patient gets bed sore. Uplift the image of nursing by your actions. So teaching is very important. I want to make sure the mentor-mentee works. Junior nurses must also be prepared to learn from seniors even if their seniors do not have a degree. Experience over-rules theory. If you are slow, then practice more. You see the blind, how do they play music or walk on the pavements? They practise. We are human and if we know our own weaknesses, we practise to improve ourselves. Be humble to learn.

You are well known among the people here especially the press fraternity and it is because you are approachable and cheery each time we meet you. How do you keep it up despite the long hours you put in?

You need to be open-minded and accept your mistakes. I look at things positive and this is something you need to do when you are in this line. If a comment is con-

structive, accept it. Some tend to ask me why do I keep smiling even though I have just been scolded by someone. I reply that it's all right. In fact it is good because I get to learn. You see others make mistakes, you take it as your lesson in life. I don't use methods which I too wouldn't want to be used on me. So you need to come up with the best solutions to deal with things and not just stick to one path alone.

What's the most common complaint received?

Attitude problem. The way they communicate. I always say, if you can care for your loved ones, why not do the same for your patients. You have to realise that if it was not for these patients, you will not have a job. It's not that I wish to see people get sick but I am grateful that having patients teaches us to be appreciative, patient and tolerant. Because of them, we get our pay. Because of them we can afford to buy the things we have. So why be nasty to your patients? We live under the roof of health. So you dare take money and don't contribute?

Nursing is known to be a key factor in the healing process. How true is that?

Actually 90% of patients can be healed through emotional support and 10% through medication and surgery. If you have a good prevention and support programme, they will heal. But we are far from doing this. I know this from my overseas attachments.

A good thing which they have and I hope to have it here too is the family dynamic discussion. This is really important. For example if someone is sick, sit the family down and make them aware of what is going on, what level of critical situation are they in and what are the medications and how to administer them. We don't have much time for that here. We just talk fast but what we need is roundtable discussions. I see those who have trained overseas have more patience to explain.

I'm sure family members want to know more so they can be mentally prepared. I feel this is the gap that we need to fill.

It is also on the art of speaking. Like for example, you cannot go direct and tell someone he or she has cancer. You need to know how to break it to them properly with

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much sensitivity and make them understand what are they really facing and what's the next step. We need to speak from our hearts and the trust will eventually form between you and your patients.



True passion: Matron Fu showing a picture of her days in nursing school.