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SEVERE MENTAL RETARDATION IN TAIWAN, R.O.C.

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

As you know, all over the world, whether east or west, north or south, having a severely mentally retarded child in the home is a real family calamity. The parents suffer sadness and disappointment all the time and go anywhere to try any medicine, even herbs, in an effort to cure their poor child. They never give up hope. Finally, they lose everything with the child still left in their hands.

In the Taiwan area, the Republic of China, there are 8,502 known severe mental retardation cases in a population of 18 million (1982 census). Causes include mild to severe cerebral palsy, brain damage, brain tumor, mongolism, microcephalia, etc. How heavy the burdens that must be born by the families, communities and government!

Actually, most of these severely handicapped persons are kept hidden away at home by their parents, because of the shame and misfortune they feel, sometimes even putting the blame on their ancestors. Of course, they never stop hoping for a miracle to happen someday to cure their child.

Ten years ago, I met a military dependent family in Kaohsiung, Taiwan's southern harbor city. The parents came to see me embracing a 14-year-old boy, who was in a rigid condition looking only six- or seven-years-old. The mo-

ther had to do absolutely everything for him, attending him lovingly day and night. She still keep alive her hope the boy would get better soon. What was worse, the mother was herself sick, suffering from cirrhosis of the liver which was almost in the terminal stage already. Only the need to go on caring for this their only son was keeping her alive. Three months later I found a private spastic children's home to take care of the child free of charge. Unfortunately, the mother died three months after the child left home and the poor boy closed his life from pneumonia twelve months later.

Two years ago, a nine-year-old boy was brought to me for treatment. He was a case of hyperactivity, playing and moving about constantly all his waking hours, but not meaningfully. He preferred to crawl on the ground playing with anything he could put his hands on, putting whatever he could into his mouth for chewing or using it to make marks on the wall. Because of his special behavior, no organization was willing to accept him. The only way was for him to stay at home, his parents looking after him constantly.

Last year I saw another severely mentally retarded boy brought to me by his mother, a very well-educated lady. The

child, twelve-years-old, was keeping himself clean and good looking with fine manners, but could not speak, read or write. However he reacted to everything in his environment appropriately. All this was the result of his mother's gentle efforts. From the time of his birth she looked after him carefully with all her heart using all her ingenuity, treating him just like a healthy child, teaching him whatever she could, providing him with exercise and proper nutrition and whatever medications the doctors would prescribe. At five years old the patient was able to stand and walk. Then he received accupuncture treatments daily for a long period of about six years. He began to act more intelligently and actively.

I have observed some cases of mongolism. Some of them can understand teacher's instructions, follow direction and are able to play musical instruments.

Most persons with severe mental retardation grow up and live under their parents' protection. Some improve, but most are unable to get reasonable (modern) treatment. The parents do their best, feeding and clothing them and searching ceaselessly for the magic cure.

The government realizes the terrible situation of these families who have nowhere to turn. Only a few are lucky enough, like the third case described above, to have families who are well off with a parent like that mother capable of serving as nurse, physical therapist and teacher. The

Welfare Department has decided to build spastic children's homes to accommodate these poor children, but this kind of plan is not easy to put into practice. The parents usually refuse to accept the fact that their children are "hopeless."

Presently in Taiwan, the Republic of China, there are three public rehabilitation centers specially for severely mentally retarded children with a total number of 500 in custody. Two more public centers are being built and organized. More than ten private homes for mental retardation cases have been established, taking care of about 2,000. Some have day care centers and offer special education with good results for many.

We will continue our efforts. Five years ago the Bobath treatment procedure was introduced to treat young children under three years old. Last June we introduced the Bobath method and treatment to our community through the assistance of a training team from Innsbruck in Austria. We will conduct further training courses by ourselves to prepare more local therapists each year. I believe that we can get rid of the unfortunate conditions for persons with mental retardation in our country in the near future.

Thank you!