

Correspondence to “Holistic care should be coming your way”
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Japan’s holistic approach to oral health: The Sakata model

Takashi Kumagai, DDS, Odont Dr hc

Naota Kumagai, DDS, MS

Makiko Nishi, DDS, MDPH

Kenji Shibuya, MD, DrPH

1. Hiyoshi Oral Health Clinics, Yamagata, Japan
2. Hiyoshi Oral Health Clinics Shiodome, Tokyo, Japan
3. Oral Health Services Research Centre, Dental School, University College Cork, Cork City, Republic of Ireland
4. Department of Global Health Policy, Graduate School of Medicine, The University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan

Corresponding author:

Kenji Shibuya, MD, DrPH

Professor and Chair, Department of Global Health Policy, Graduate School of Medicine,
University of Tokyo

Email: shibuyak@m.u-tokyo.ac.jp

Address: 7-3-1, Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-0033, Japan

Japan is facing major challenges to its health system and the intersecting crises of rapid aging, growing non-communicable diseases and fiscal sustainability. To tackle them, recent legislation seeks to promote the differentiation of hospitals by function and community-level integration of medical services, long-term care and prevention by 2025: i.e., integrated community-based comprehensive services (ICCS) (1). As Wilson articulated in his commentary (2), oral health is an essential part of ICCS. The committee organised by the Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, recently recommended the promotion of inter-professional collaboration, oral care in the context of ICCS, and preventive oral health care (3). The Japanese government is currently developing a new vision for oral health care along this line.

We think, however, that holistic care is not sufficient as the health system should be rebuilt in the future as a new “social system” which is integrated to provide values to the patients. In 2015, an advisory panel, appointed by the health minister, of young experts in their 30s and 40s, developed a vision of health care for Japan in 2035. This *Health Care 2035* report envisioned a health care system built for the next 20 years and designed for all lifestyles and people, from children to older people, from patients to providers, where individuals feel secure and supported to make the life and work choices that are right for them (4). It will require that we connect to and consider various elements, including resources of the private and non-profit sectors; lifestyles and behaviours; work environments; housing and communities; economics; and the values of the people the health care system is built to serve.

Sakata City, populated with approximately 100,000 people, is a unique rural community in Japan, having a model with this point of view. Since 1980, a group of dentists (re-educating themselves and other dentists nationally to become “oral physicians” rather than dental surgeons), hygienists, specialists, community nurses, school teachers and government officials has collaborated with the private sector, academic institutions and civil society. The group has gradually developed a new social system to enhance oral care in a holistic manner with an emphasis on the patients’ values (5).

Local industries have started to pay for a preventive oral care, which benefits employees and their family members. It also benefits employers because good health enhances productivity. The group has developed a consortium with large companies to advocate and facilitate the continuum of quality care after patient transfers. The consortium has developed a cloud-based, people-centered health information system. This system integrates various personal data and facilitates a personalised approach to health promotion and disease prevention by empowering each individual to design their own life

style, with an ambitious goal, namely “KEEP 28” to keep all of your own teeth for your general and oral health even for a 100-year life span. In 2016, Sakata City legislated for a holistic approach to oral care (6), obviously being influenced by these activities of the group. Professor Wilson’s proposed advancements in oral health along with the *Health Care 2035* vision are already taking place in a rural town in Japan.

References

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