

The community-based integrated care system in Japan: Health care and nursing care challenges posed by super-aged society

Peipei Song¹, Wei Tang^{2,*}

¹ The Institute for Global Health Policy Research, Bureau of International Health Cooperation, National Center for Global Health and Medicine, Tokyo, Japan;

² International Health Care Center, National Center for Global Health and Medicine, Tokyo, Japan.

Summary

Japan is experiencing unprecedented aging of its population. People age 65 years or older accounted for 28.1% of the total population in 2018, and that proportion is expected to reach 33.3% in 2036 and 38.4% in 2065. In 2017, the average life expectancy in Japan was 81.09 years for men and 87.26 years for women. By 2065, it is expected to reach 84.95 years for men and 91.35 years for women. Population aging affects health and long-term care systems. The government proposed the establishment of "a community-based integrated care system" by 2025 with the purpose of comprehensively ensuring the provision of health care, nursing care, preventive care, housing, and livelihood support. This will require health care and nursing care professionals who are capable of fully understanding the physical and mental characteristics of elderly people and the fostering of organic collaboration with others professionals in the community-based integrated care system. A department of gerontology or geriatric medicine is desired to be established in each medical school to teach students medicine and efficient medical care, to conduct research, and to develop personnel to facilitate this paradigm shift. In 2018, there were 263 colleges of nursing with an admissions capacity of 23,667. In Japan, Certified Nurse Specialists can specialize in 13 areas as of December 2016. The number of Certified Nurse Specialists increased to 2,279 as of December 2018. One hundred and forty-four of those specialists specialized in Gerontological Nursing while 53 specialized in Home Care Nursing. The number of nurses specializing in Gerontological Nursing and Home Care Nursing is desired to be increased in order to implement and improve community-based comprehensive care.

Keywords: Health care, nursing care, super-aged society, community-based integrated care system, education

1. Population aging in Japan

An elderly population refers to the proportion of persons age 65 years or older out of the total population. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations define an "aging society" as one in which more than 7% of the population is 65 years or older, an "aged society" as a society in which more than 14% of the population is 65 years or older, and a "super-aged

society" as a society in which more than 21% of the population is 65 years or older (1,2).

Japan is experiencing population aging that is unprecedented. The elderly population (65 years or older) in Japan only accounted for about 5% of the total population in 1950, but that proportion exceeded 7% in 1970 and 14% in 1994. The rate of aging has continued to increase, reaching 21.5% in 2007 (3) and 28.1% in 2018 (4). The elderly population of Japan is forecast to continue to grow in the future and is expected to account for 33.3% of the population in 2036 and 38.4% in 2065 (Figure 1). In other words, 1 in 2.6 persons in the Japanese population will be elderly in 2065 (4).

At the same time, progress in medical technology has decreased mortality rates, prolonging the mean life

*Address correspondence to:

Dr. Wei Tang, International Health Care Center, National Center for Global Health and Medicine, 1-21-1 Toyama Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 162-8655, Japan.

E-mail: politang-ky@umin.ac.jp

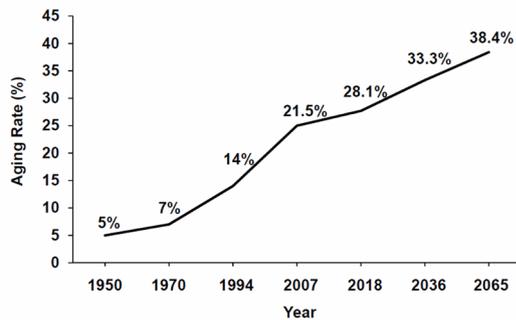


Figure 1. Changes in population aging in Japan and estimates for the future. From: Cabinet Office: White Paper on Population Aging (3,4).

span. The average life expectancy in Japan is 81.09 years for men and 87.26 years for women in 2017. By 2065, it is expected to reach 84.95 years for men and 91.35 years for women (4).

2. Medical care modality faced by super-aged society

Population aging affects health and long-term care systems. Long-term care for older adults has been a priority for the past two decades. In 2000, Japan implemented a universal social long-term care insurance system, under the slogan, "from care by family to care by society" (5,6). This historic policy provides a variety of home, community-based, and institutional services to which every Japanese person age 65 years or older is entitled based strictly on physical and mental status.

A point worth noting is that as the country's demographics change, the disease structure changes, and therefore the demand for medical care changes. Medical care for the elderly represents a field involving many care needs, including complications, comorbidities, and conditions unique to the elderly. Given the considerable aging of the general population in Japan, future demands for medical care will accelerate the transition to health care and nursing care services for degenerative diseases, such as dementia and geriatric syndrome (7). In addition to acute-stage medical care, the provision of health care and nursing care needs to be considered for the convalescent and chronic stages of conditions such as osteoporosis, atherosclerotic cardiovascular diseases (and cerebrovascular disorders in particular), and infections (and pneumonia in particular).

Moreover, medical care for the elderly that merely deals with disorders of organs is unsatisfactory. A broad perspective that considers the associated function of all organs, activities of daily living (ADL) and other indicators of physical function, mental care, and environmental modifications is required, so medical care is where holistic care is most needed.

With these facts in mind, the Japanese Government proposed the establishment of a "Community-based Integrated Care System" by 2025, when baby boomers

will become age 75 or older (8). The purpose of this system is to comprehensively ensure the provision of health care, nursing care, preventive care, housing, and livelihood support.

3. Promoting the education of health care and nursing care professionals for elderly people

The number of personnel engaged in providing community-based comprehensive care needs to be increased to implement the "Community-based Integrated Care System." Health care and nursing care professionals who are capable of fully understanding the physical and mental characteristics of the elderly are urgently needed, and to foster the organic collaboration with others professionals in the community-based integrated care system. The most important issues are educating health care and nursing care professionals engaged in medical care for the elderly as well as all students who aim to become healthcare providers and raising awareness of this situation. Thus, the education of health care and nursing care professionals for the elderly must be improved.

A department of gerontology or geriatric medicine is desired to be established in each medical school to teach students medicine and efficient medical care, to conduct research, and to develop personnel to facilitate this paradigm shift (7). Dedicated instructors in medical care for the elderly need to be assigned to every medical school, an educational system needs to be constructed, and collaboration with a wide variety of local entities, including medical facilities and welfare and nursing care facilities, needs to be promoted.

Many measures have also been implemented to provide education to nursing care professionals. According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology of Japan, there were 263 colleges of nursing with an admissions capacity of 23,667 in 2018 (9). In Japan, Certified Nurse Specialists can specialize in 13 areas as of December 2016 (10). Gerontological Nursing was recognized as one such area in 2002. A nurse specializing in this area provides quality nursing care to improve the quality of life of elderly people with complex health problems such as dementia and dysphagia at facilities where the elderly are admitted, hospitalized, and cared for. Home Care Nursing is another area that was recognized in 2012. A nurse specializing in this area provides support to so that families can care for elderly patients at home. In addition, nurses specializing in this area will help to create a new system of home care and promote cooperation with existing services.

As of 2019, 107 universities provide an education for individuals seeking to become Certified Nurse Specialists; the curriculum on offer has expanded to 42 courses in Gerontological Nursing and 19 courses in Home Care Nursing (11). As of December 2018,

the number of Certified Nurse Specialists in the 13 specialties has increased to 2,279. Of those nurses, 144 are specialized in Gerontological Nursing and 53 are specialized in Home Care Nursing (12). The number of specialists in Gerontological Nursing and Home Care Nursing is desired to be increased to provide and improve community-based comprehensive care.

In conclusion, comprehensive care plays a particularly important role in the health care and nursing care faced by super-aged society. In order to implement the community-based integrated care system in Japan, health care and nursing care professionals who are capable of fully understanding the physical and mental characteristics of the elderly are urgently needed, and to foster the organic collaboration with others professionals. The number of nurses specializing in Gerontological Nursing and Home Care Nursing is desired to be increased in order to implement and improve community-based comprehensive care.

References

1. Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations. Presentation by H.E. Mr. Yoshifumi Okamura, Ambassador and Deputy Representative of Japan to the United Nations At a side event to the High Level Political Forum "Mainstreaming Gender and Aging in the SDGs". <https://www.un.emb-japan.go.jp/jp/statements/okamura071316.html> (accessed May 6, 2019)
2. Tahara Y. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation in a super-aged society- Is there an age limit for cardiopulmonary resuscitation? *Circ J.* 2016; 80:1102-1103.
3. Cabinet Office. White Paper on Population Aging (2008 version). https://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2008/zenbun/20pdf_index.html (accessed May 8, 2019) (in Japanese)
4. Cabinet Office. White Paper on Population Aging (2019 version). https://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2019/zenbun/01pdf_index.html (accessed May 8, 2019) (in Japanese)
5. Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare of Japan. Long-term Care Insurance in Japan <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/topics/elderly/care/index.html> (accessed May 10, 2019)
6. Tamiya N, Noguchi H, Nishi A, et al. Population ageing and wellbeing: Lessons from Japan's long-term care insurance policy. *Lancet.* 2011; 378:1183-1192.
7. Arai H, Ouchi Y, Toba K, Endo T, Shimokado K, Tsubota K, Matsuo S, Mori H, Yumura W, Yokode M, Rakugi H, Ohshima S. Japan as the front-runner of super-aged societies: Perspectives from medicine and medical care in Japan. *Geriatr Gerontol Int.* 2015; 15:673-687.
8. Tsutsui T. Implementation process and challenges for the community-based integrated care system in Japan. *Int J Integr Care.* 2014; 14:e002.
9. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology of Japan. Current status of and issues with nursing colleges. <http://www.janpu.or.jp/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/monbukagakusyou20180618.pdf> (accessed May 11, 2019) (in Japanese)
10. Japanese Nursing Association. Certified Nurse Specialist. <https://nintei.nurse.or.jp/nursing/qualification/cns> (accessed May 13, 2019) (in Japanese)
11. Japanese Nursing Association. List of institutions providing an education to become a certified nurse specialist and courses. https://nintei.nurse.or.jp/nursing/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/1_cns_kikan_kateitiran_2019.pdf (accessed May 13, 2019) (in Japanese)
12. Japanese Nursing Association. Number of certified nurse specialists registered in each prefecture. https://nintei.nurse.or.jp/nursing/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CNS_map-201812.pdf (accessed May 13, 2019) (in Japanese)

(Received May 20, 2019; Accepted June 22, 2019)