

D. Building Dementia-Friendly Society in Japan

Overview

In Japan there are 31.7 million people over 65 years old and by 2050, it is expected that one in every three persons will be 65 years old or over.¹⁴⁴ In addition, there are 4.6 million people diagnosed with dementia.¹⁴⁵ “A huge number of people with dementia throughout Japan are unable to receive appropriate treatment and support due to a lack of accurate knowledge and information and to insufficient understanding on the part of the people around them. Anxiety and isolation worsen their condition and their daily lives are a far from life with dignity.”- by these words, the Japanese society voiced its concerns and views about the dementia problem in their country. (*People with Dementia Conference October, 2006 Japan*)¹⁴⁶

The Japanese society realized that greater awareness and action on the part of nongovernmental organizations and individual citizens are needed as well as efforts by national and local governments and professionals in health care and social services- in other words a collective societal action is required. As such, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in Japan adopted a public health strategy to address dementia.

Japan's Campaign to Build Compassionate Communities

In 2005 the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in collaboration with hugely diverse groups of community organizations, launched a 10-year nationwide dementia care initiative. The Initiative, which is called “The Campaign to Understand Dementia and Build Community Networks”, aims to create safe and comfortable communities for people with dementia. The campaign is led by the “100-Member Committee”, an alliance of more than 100 community organizations and individuals. The Campaign is comprised of four major programs, each of which is led by a working group responsible for its planning and implementation.¹⁴⁷

The Campaign's Four Programs

1. Nationwide caravan to train one million dementia supporters¹⁴⁸

The goal of this program is to train 7 million volunteers by 2017 to be “dementia supporters” who have good knowledge and understanding of dementia. As of September 2014 there were **5.5 million** dementia supporters across the country who proactively identify, watch over, and assist people with dementia and their families in local communities and workplaces. The

¹⁴⁴ <http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/ListE.do?lid=000001127041>

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.ilcjournal.org/agingE/index.html>

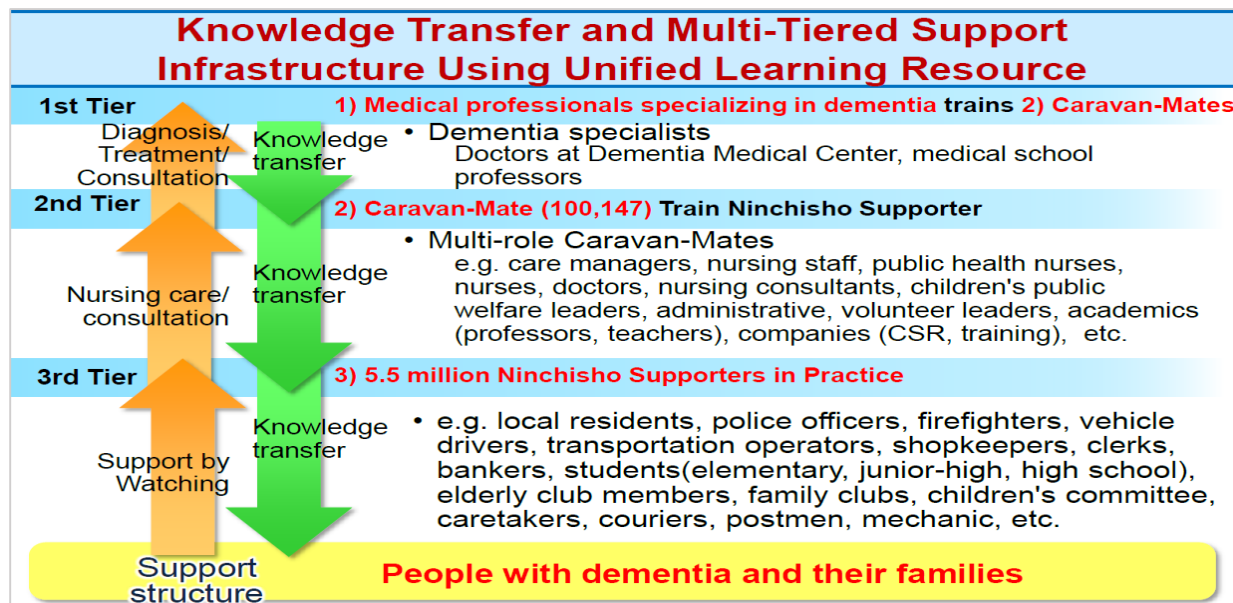
¹⁴⁶ http://longevity.ilcjournal.org/f_issues/0703.html

¹⁴⁷ http://longevity.ilcjournal.org/f_issues/0603.html

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.ncgg.go.jp/topics/dementia/documents/Topic4-4HirokoSugawara.pdf>

operating model of this program is based on a multi-tier knowledge transfer and training structure that involves all members of society. (See Figure 15)

Figure 15 Japan: Dementia Supporter Caravan Model



Source: Hiroko Sugawara. Community-Care Policy Network, Japan. Presentation at Global Dementia Legacy Event Japan November 2014¹⁴⁹

2. Building dementia-friendly communities

The objective of this program is to promote, support, and recognize initiatives that aim to build dementia friendly communities in which people with dementia are empowered to have high aspirations and enjoy a sociable and safe life, knowing they can contribute and participate in meaningful activities.¹⁵⁰ Such empowerment can have a profound impact on a person's quality of life, not only for individuals with dementia but also for their carers and loved ones. The increasing number of compassionate communities programs that is seen in Japan now is a result of a national Japanese prize that is annually offered to communities that have become 'dementia-friendly'.

Some features of dementia-friendly communities in Japan include:

- **Regional Comprehensive Support networks** -These are groups of health-care providers, long-term care providers, users of their services, local residents, and government officials in a region/local community who work together to identify the needs of their community and plan and implement appropriate prevention and

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.ncgg.go.jp/topics/dementia/documents/Topic4-4HirokoSugawara.pdf>

¹⁵⁰ http://longevity.ilc-japan.org/f_issues/0603.html

community-based services in order to build a community where people at risk of dementia can enjoy living independently in their homes.

- **Happy cafés** - have been set up in various locations across the country as a means of promoting socialization and preventing elderly from withdrawing from society.
- **Wandering-watch program** - educating elementary and junior high school students to help persons with dementia who have lost their way.
- **“Community support centres”**

These centres provide a full range of services to the elderly and patients with dementia in their own communities. A variety of educational and physical exercise classes are offered to reduce the risk among old people of requiring long-term care in the future: muscle strengthening sessions, prevention of malnutrition, and prevention of social withdrawal. Home visits are made to the people who find it difficult to attend classes.

- **Patients’ networks**- building networks of patients who have dementia so that they can meet and develop a sense of companionship and solidarity and share experiences and feelings.

3. People with Dementia Annual Conference¹⁵¹

The first “People with Dementia Conference” was held in October 2006 to ensure that dementia care programs are shaped according to the needs of the people they serve. The unique feature of this conference is that groups of patients with dementia were given the opportunity to discuss and speak up in public about their personal experience with the illness, suffering, capabilities, needs, and wishes. In the second day of the conference, the participants summarized their needs, wishes, and messages to their families and communities into a 17-point Appeal.

Parallel to the campaign, Japan made major revisions to the health care system and the long-term care insurance system in 2005-2006.

Reform of the health care and long-term care insurance systems¹⁵²

The reform aims to create a system through which old people including people who have dementia can receive the services and care that meet their changing needs and allow them to live with dignity in a friendly community. Figure 16 illustrates the priorities/goals of the system reform.

The basic perspectives of the system revision are:

- Prevent the need for long term care ---- by shifting to a “prevention-oriented system”
- Promote “Aging in Place”----- by establishing a new service system focusing on community-based services, residential care, and a regional support network

¹⁵¹ http://longevity.ilc-japan.org/f_issues/0703.html

¹⁵² <http://longevity.ilc-japan.org/pdf/Overview%20of%20the%20Revision%20of%20LTCL.pdf>

- Ensure fairness related to benefits and financial burden for in-home service users and long-term care facility residents ----by reviewing the facility benefits and insurance premium and system management
- Assure quality of services based on users' appropriate choices and providers' competence---- by mandating data reporting for monitoring and audit purposes, improving expertise in services and living environments (training of care providers and defining care standards), and reviewing service providers' regulations

Conclusion

Japan's aging demographic is a powerful social and political force. The variety and scale of the community and governmental initiatives that have been implemented in the elderly and dementia care context since 2005 indicate that the Japanese society places great emphasis on prevention, awareness/ promotion, population needs, community development and partnerships, supportive systems and environments, and capacity of health care providers. The Japanese experience demonstrates that addressing dementia/elderly care requires a concerted and collaborative effort from all sectors of society to build dementia-friendly communities supported by a high quality and integrated health and social care system.

Figure 16 Japan: Overview of the Long Term Care System Reform
