

Establishment of Niigata University of Health and Welfare

Hideaki E. Takahashi, M.D.

Niigata University of Health and Welfare was established in Niigata City, Japan, in April of 2001. I would like to present the background leading to the establishment of the University, the reasons for its founding, a statement of our mission, the approach we take with educating our students, and our plans for the future.

Social Background of the Establishment of the University

Changes in Make-up of the Japanese Population

Progress resulting from advancements in medical science, improvements in the public health system, fulfillment of the medical insurance system, and the improvement in the standard of living after World War II has led to a significant increase in the average life span of the Japanese population.

The percentage of the population in Japan over 65 years of age has rapidly increased in the last half of the 20th century. The people of Japan enjoy the longest life expectancy in the world. In only the last 24 years, the percentage of the population over age 65 years has doubled, from 7% to 14%. Thus, our population is aging. In fact, the arrival of the "super-aged society", with approximately 25% of the population over 65 years of age, will occur sometime early in the 21st century.

Training of People Who Will Support the Aged Society

The percentage of the population in Niigata Prefecture over 65 years of age was 21.3% in the year 2000, compared with the national average of 14.1%. This demonstrates that Niigata

Prefecture is more aged, on average, than the rest of Japan.

Medical care and welfare are fields concerned with the health and living of the people, and will provide the basic medical treatment and social services in daily life and in hospitals and welfare facilities for the handicapped, the elderly, and clients. It has been acknowledged that there is a critical need to extend the education of those who work in these fields to the level of a four-year university and graduate school. There is also a need for an increase in the number of specialists working in this field. Those with highly specialized experience in these areas are expected to exemplify a high standard of occupational ethics.

To answer this need, a four-year university was established for the education of physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, registered dietitians, and social workers, with the support of the Niigata Prefecture Government, the Niigata City Government, and many other organizations and companies in Niigata Prefecture.

Geographical Location of Niigata in Japan

Niigata Prefecture has a population of two and a half million, and is located in the middle of the west coast of Honshu, the main island of Japan. It is situated approximately 350 kilometers directly north of metropolitan Tokyo, and is connected with Tokyo via the Shinkansen (bullet train) and an expressway.

The University is located in Niigata City, which has a population of one-half million, and is the center of politics, economy, and culture in

Niigata Prefecture. Niigata City has a long history of interaction with various countries such as China, South Korea, North Korea, Mongolia, and Russia. Niigata City is an ever-expanding international transportation center on the west coast of Japan.

Organization of Schools and Departments

Niigata University of Health and Welfare has two schools, the School of Health Sciences, consisting of the Departments of Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, and Health and Nutrition, and the School of Social Welfare, consisting of the Department of Social Work. The curriculum involves four years of study, and the initial number of students is 320. It is anticipated that the total enrollment will be in excess of 1,200 students by the year 2004.

Statement of Mission of the University

1. The university will educate students to support and enhance the quality of life (QOL) of the handicapped, the elderly, patients in hospitals, and clients in welfare facilities, by training the students to be co-medical specialists in the fields of medical care, welfare, and health promotion.

We may call them "QOL supporters".

2. The university will meet the needs of the community by . . .

- actively organizing and implementing a program of continuing education for specialists who provide community health and welfare information to the public.

- supporting medical welfare facilities and the at-home care support system by an information communication network.

- organizing and hosting seminars and research meetings for people in the health and welfare field, and for elementary school, junior high school, and high school teachers.

- planning and hosting a special summer program for high school students.

- establishing classes for the general public with lectures on health and welfare.

- actively promoting volunteerism by the staff of the university and its students.

3. The university will contribute to the international society by . . .

- establishing an exchange program for students and faculty from countries of East Asia, as well as the rest of the world, in order to contribute to the mutual understanding and advancement of medical care, welfare, and health promotion.

- hosting symposia and workshops with the countries of East Asia, for the exchange of information on the fields of medicare and welfare.

- publishing the Niigata Journal of Health and Welfare, which will report progress in the areas of medical care, welfare, and health promotion in Niigata, as well as in other regions of Japan, and will serve as a forum for exchanging information and the outcome of research in these fields.

Content of the University's Education System

The university will educate students in the specialties of medical care and welfare so that they will be able to meet the needs of the community through having a profound understanding of the people they serve.

A curriculum has been established in each department to prepare students to qualify for a state license by passing an examination either for physiotherapist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, registered dietitian, or social worker.

With this in mind, the following goals for education were established:

- The university will educate students to be intimately aware of issues involving the QOL of the handicapped, the elderly, patients in hospitals, and clients in welfare facilities, and of how the QOL of these individuals can be improved.

- The university will educate students who have a high level of ethics, and have the potential to

make humane relationships with the above-mentioned people.

- The university will educate students who understand the implications of differences in age, gender, culture, and ethnicity, and who are able to relate to and communicate with the above-mentioned people.

- The university will educate students who can participate in a team approach with various experts in the fields of medical care, welfare, and health promotion.

- The university will educate students to have a high level of common sense, and a deep knowledge and skillfulness in the areas of medical care and welfare.

The students are encouraged to acquire a broad knowledge in the liberal arts such as ethics, philosophy, history, law, economics, and literature, and to have a good command of information technology. Students will also be encouraged to gain sufficient command of a foreign language so that they may be able to communicate with foreign people.

It will be emphasized that students acquire an attitude of self-learning and independence.

Organization of the Course of Study

Composition of the Five Groups of Subjects

The University will educate students to be highly qualified specialists with a broad view of health promotion, medical care, and welfare. The following curriculum was designed in order to educate students to understand and appreciate the world of other related specialties.

1) Basic subjects in liberal arts: Students will take entry-level subjects with the intent of learning basic professional skills. These basic subjects will also serve to supplement students who did not take required prerequisite subjects in high school.

2) Subjects in liberal arts: Through common subjects in the five departments, the University will educate students to define the QOL for the

handicapped, the elderly, patients in hospitals, and clients in welfare facilities, and to learn the necessary general knowledge as medical care and welfare experts. At the same time, the students will be taught to exhibit humane behavior toward their clients, and a broad and accepting view of others. The students are encouraged and expected to learn these methods and approaches, and to act as a model for others through their daily living by establishing habits of self-control in their own health.

3) Basic subjects in medical care and welfare: These subjects are designated as the core curriculum and the common subjects of the five departments. These courses will be either compulsory or elective, and are an introduction to the fields of medical care and welfare. These courses serve as the common denominator of the curricula of the five departments.

4) Basic subjects in each specialty: Students will take courses in techniques and management that are fundamental to each of the specialties of physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, nutrition, and social work.

5) Advanced subjects in each specialty: Students will attain advanced knowledge in the areas of technology and management by taking advanced subjects in each specialty.

From the above curriculum, it is recommended that the students of both the Schools of Health Sciences and Social Work choose the core curriculum, the basic subjects of medical care and welfare, either compulsorily or electively. Thus, the students in each of the five departments will share in the knowledge of all five specialties.

Basic Seminar and Advisory System

The basic seminar consists of groups of seven to ten students with a faculty advisor. The students in the Basic Seminar I, held from April to July, are from the same department. They will

learn communication skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In the Basic Seminar II, held from September to January, students from all five departments form a team, together with a faculty advisor. They are to discuss and solve a common problem, and prepare reports as a team. The basic seminar is considered as the first step in the curriculum for teaching teamwork. The students will learn how to support, as a team, the quality of life of the handicapped, the elderly, patients in hospitals, and clients in welfare facilities.

Conclusion

The students from this University will receive jobs not only in the Niigata area, but also all over Japan. We will encourage students to support the quality of life of the handicapped and the elderly in the fields of medical care, welfare, and health promotion in our country, which is rapidly changing to a super-aged society. Furthermore, they are expected to extend their activities in Asia and the rest of the world.