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Japanese Nursing Association

Megumi Teshima, a board member of the International Council of Nurses (ICN), spoke on the theme “Global Crisis - Securing Human Resources for Health” at a symposium on health human resources held by the Science Council of Japan (SCJ), a representative organization of Japanese scientists

On January 11, 2025, the Nursing Subcommittee of the Committee on Health/Human Life Science of the Science Council of Japan (SCJ), the representative organization of Japanese scientist community under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister, and has actively contributed to the development of academia, held a symposium titled “Health Human Resources Required in a Society with a Declining and Unevenly Distributed Population,” jointly supported by the Japanese Nursing Association, the International Council of Nurses (ICN), and others.



Photo: Prof. Teshima giving a lecture on the theme “Global Crisis – Securing Human Resources for Health”

This symposium was the first in a series of public symposiums organized by the SCJ’s Nursing Subcommittee with the aim of maintaining a system in which all citizens can benefit from the quality and quantity of healthcare services they desire, regardless of their location or time of need. Japan achieved universal health coverage (UHC) relatively earlier than other countries, but while simultaneously facing a declining and unevenly distributed population, there is a need to develop a healthcare delivery system that adapts to demographic changes. While the design of the healthcare delivery system is progressing, the framework for human resources has not changed significantly.

Thus, we are holding discussions that transcend the boundaries of professions to consider models of activity that address the complex issues in a declining population society, the knowledge and skills that should be shared, the future course of education to meet these needs, and how each healthcare personnel can work autonomously and flexibly. The first symposium in the series presented proposals on the challenges and activities needed in a society facing a declining population, from the perspective of nursing, medicine, and physiotherapy among the healthcare professions, accompanied by discussions on the health human resources needed in society.

The symposium sessions on the current status in Japan included presentations titled “Issues of Regional and Workplace Imbalances and Autonomy in the Nursing Profession” from the perspective of nurses, “Regional Imbalances of Physicians and the Countermeasures” from the perspective of physicians, and “Transforming Local Communities and the Utilization of Rehabilitation Professionals” from the perspective of physiotherapists.

Prof. Teshima, as an ICN board member, took the stage with the theme “Global Crisis - Securing Human Resources for Health” and explained Japan’s situation in a global society by comparing the world and Japan, while showing global data and examples from various countries based on a wide range of knowledge from the perspectives of Japan, Asia and the world. Firstly, with regard to the global challenge of the decline in the attractiveness of nursing as a career, Prof. Teshima focused on the fact that in OECD data*1 comparing 2018 and 2022 after the COVID-19 pandemic. While the interest in nursing among 15-year-olds has halved in half of the OECD countries, the figure for Japan was the highest. As a background to this, she stated that Japan has been

successful in carefully conveying the appeal of the nursing profession to young people through open campus events at universities. On another front, she explained that the reality is that interest in the nursing profession is not necessarily high at age 18, when young people start to choose a career path. Secondly, looking at global challenges faced by nursing professionals, the largest group of healthcare workers, Prof. Teshima cited that they are often not included in the decision-making process, that many are women and face low wages and poor working conditions, and that there is a nursing workforce shortage, expressing concern that UHC is in a crisis.

In closing her presentation, Prof. Teshima indicated OECD report*2, stating that more than 75% of doctors and nurses are aware that they have skills beyond the roles and responsibilities they routinely undertake, and that nearly 80% of preventive care could be delegated from physicians to nurses and other professionals, emphasizing the need to maximize the potential of nurses.

During the question-and-answer session after each speaker's presentation, many questions were raised by the participants. The following are some of the Q&A that Prof. Teshima responded to. The first question was about whether the rate of nurses pursuing master's or doctoral degrees, or acquiring certifications, would not increase without workplace incentives, as their salaries do not reflect these achievements. She stated, "In terms of compensation, what is more important to employers is not whether a nurse has pursued further education, but rather what the nurse has become capable of doing. In order to foster autonomous and flexible personnel who can handle complex issues, Japan should also create a system for continuing education, such as supporting graduate school advancement from a long-term perspective," citing examples from other countries. In addition, Prof. Teshima responded to another question about how she views the Japan's problem of the uneven distribution of nursing professionals including new graduates and physicians, in specific areas such as cosmetic surgery, which is medical care not covered by insurance from the standpoint of a medical professional with a public interest, by saying "As a way of understanding the problem, we need to take a hard look at how the conventional environment and working style in which our generation worked was so out of the ordinary, and how it was taken for granted that people would work without any incentives." Furthermore, when asked, in line with the fact that there are many women among nurses worldwide, especially in Asia, how much of an impact could be expected on turnover in Japan by intervening in this issue, Prof. Teshima explained, "Compared to Western countries, the prevalence of advanced practice nurses (APNs) is lower in Asia, and it is also speculated that there are influences from Asian cultural factors. It is important to raise awareness of how to embrace health human resources, including nursing professionals, as a gender-neutral profession for such societies, and the ICN is working to this end."

*1 OECD (2024), "Fewer young people want to become nurses in half of OECD countries (Policy brief)", https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/fewer-young-people-want-to-become-nurses-in-half-of-oecd-countries_e6612040-en.html#:~:text=The%20interest%20of%2015-year-old%20students%20in%20pursuing%20careers,2022%2C%20according%20to%20data%20from%20the%20PI SA%20survey

*2 OECD (2020), "Realising the Potential of Primary Health Care, OECD Health Policy Studies", OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a92adee4-en>.

*3 Shipman, S. and C. Sinsky (2013), "Expanding primary care capacity by reducing waste and improving the efficiency of care", Health Affairs, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2013.0539>.

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