

## Editorial

### *The Present State of Acupuncturist and Moxibustionist Education in Japan*

The mainstay of education for acupuncturists/moxibustionists in Japan are three-year vocational colleges. There are 11 universities, but as many as 90 vocational colleges (as of April 2013). Acupuncturist/moxibustionist education is also implemented in educational facilities for visually disabled people in each prefecture. The number of people who take the national examination for the practice of acupuncture and moxibustion is on an increasing trend, such that in fiscal 2012, there were 5,015 applicants for the national exam for acupuncturists and 4,996 applicants for the national exam for moxibustionists, corresponding to approximately double the numbers ten years ago (fiscal 2002: 2,645 applicants for the acupuncturist exam, 2,613 applicants for the moxibustionist exam).

People who wish to become a practitioner of acupuncture or moxibustion in Japan must go to a university or vocational college that provides training for acupuncturists/moxibustionists, acquire a prescribed number of units that include technical education, and pass a national examination. The national exam, however, is a test of knowledge level only, and technical skills are in part left up to the discretion of each training facility. For this reason, practitioners of acupuncture and moxibustion may achieve a uniform level of knowledge, but their technical level is not uniform at present.

Given this social background, movements for enhancing the quality of acupuncturist/moxibustionist education have begun to emerge. One is a movement initiated by the Japan College Association of Oriental Medicine, which is an association dedicated to cultivating practitioners of acupuncture and moxibustion. With the objective of having students achieve a uniform technical skills level before graduating, it adopted a technical evaluation system for students of all member schools in fiscal 2009. The system aimed to allow teachers to evaluate students in other schools based on a unified evaluation criteria, as a first attempt of its kind in the field of acupuncturist and moxibustionist education. The problem, however, was that only 46 (including 2 universities), and roughly half, of 90 vocational colleges that provide acupuncturist/moxibustionist education were members of the Association. This prevented the uniformization of the technical level of all national exam applicants.

On the other hand, enhanced education has become available to those who have acquired qualification to practice acupuncture and moxibustion. Postgraduate training was previously provided only by clinics that recruited them, but institutions affiliated with university hospitals and educational institutions such as vocational colleges that provide acupuncturist/moxibustionist education, have also begun to establish a framework for offering postgraduate training in acupuncture and moxibustion. Furthermore, the Acupuncture-moxibustion Promotion Organization for the People Japan (AcuPOPJ) is presently preparing to offer postgraduate clinical training for acupuncturists/moxibustionists (slated for full-scale implementation from fiscal 2014).

Before acupuncturists/moxibustionists became a national qualification, a skills test was also held as part of the qualifying examination, but along with the transition to a national qualification, the skills test was abolished. It is now twenty years since acupuncturists/moxibustionists have become a national qualification. Perhaps it is time to review not only the examination, but also the system of acupuncturist/moxibustionist education itself, with the aim of achieving a uniformity of both knowledge and technical levels.

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