

Editorial

Background to the Emergence of Integrative Medicine in Japan

Integrative medicine began to take shape in Japan in response to the shift in the final value judgment of medical care—from the simple, subjective *cure* of diseases to health *care* that aims to enhance QOL (quality of life) by incorporating people's (patients') thoughts and subjective views—accompanying changes in disease structures as a result of the development of modern Western medicine, as well as changes in patients' awareness and actions in regard to diseases, and changes in demographics based on an aging and shrinking society.

Today, lifestyle diseases account for the majority of diseases experienced by people in Japan, and chronic diseases are most prevalent among elder care (dementia, nursing care, etc.) in today's super aging society, such that proper treatment cannot be provided alone by a single clinical department of modern Western medicine. At the same time, even when multiple departments are involved, they do not necessarily cooperate well with each other, because modern Western medicine has become further segmented and specialized through its development. In fact, the essence of holistic medicine has been lost and medicine has fallen into a state where “the forest cannot be seen for the trees.” A further continuation of this situation would prevent any establishment of a strong relationship between ordinary people (patients) and medical workers, and would ultimately create a vicious cycle that leads to mistrust in medical services.

On the other hand, people who receive medical care (patients) are showing increasing interest in people's (patients') health trends and preventive medicine owing to the dissemination of knowledge about medicine and medical care by various media outlets in Japan in recent years. They are also displaying a shift from passive to active awareness. Furthermore, given today's aging and shrinking society and seamless lifestyles, people (patients) are led to value QOL over medical care that focuses narrowly on the non-ordinary event of disease cure, and seek health care, including nursing care, as a wide, ordinary event. Moreover, entangled with tax increase and national finance issues that have surfaced as a result of an increase in the burden of medical expenses in Japan's aging and shrinking society, needs for traditional medicine and complementary/alternative medicine and interest in integrative medicine have emerged beyond the existing framework of medical care comprised solely of modern Western medicine. Integrative medicine has thus begun to take shape in Japan as a new concept of health care.

In other words, it can be said that integrative medicine has emerged in Japan through the application of traditional medicine and complementary/alternative medicine in response to a shift in needs from quantity to quality medical care accompanying changes in demographics and disease structures.

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