
Editorial

Medical Care in a Sustainable Society

Modern Western medicine forms the backbone of current medical care in industrialized countries, and is founded on a consumer society based on mass production and mass consumption. In medical settings, saving lives is an overarching imperative, and in the name of saving lives, how much of the Earth's environmental capitals are spent is never questioned, although the amount of human resources and physical resources (medical materials) that are spent, sometimes are. For this reason, most healthcare professionals do not have much interest in environmental issues. However, human beings are part of the Earth's ecosystem and cannot exist completely outside it. As long as human beings live on Earth, human lives can only survive within the allowable limits of the global environment (although this condition may change depending on future advancements in space development).

Today, the world is focusing its concerns on environmental issues, such as reduction of carbon dioxide, and various energy issues, including the peak oil issue (global oil production reaching peak and thereafter declining), safety of nuclear power stations, and alternative energy sources. Under this situation, the countries of the world are examining and exploring such topics as slow life and slow food, zero emission, and financial and industrial crises, toward building a recycling society that is sustainable both environmentally and economically. The sustainability of medical care per se will also come to be questioned. It will become inevitable to depart from medical care founded on a consumer society and necessary to create a "new medical model" or "new health care model" for saving human lives while also giving consideration to the world's ecosystem. Sustainability of medical care cannot be achieved simply by the current medical model alone, as it is based on modern Western medicine founded on a consumer society.

Whatever the case may be, it will become necessary to establish eco-medicine, or to go a step further to provide eco-health care, which includes medical care that is ecological, economical and ethical, or elements referred to as "green medicine" in foreign countries. Here, "hybrid medicine," or "integrative medicine," is medicine that combines modern Western medicine with traditional, complementary and alternative medicine that does not rely on electricity, fuel, medical equipment and parts, and harbors the possibility of developing into eco-medicine or eco-health care.

All capitals on Earth, whether human or material, are finite. When pursuing medicine for a sustainable society, traditional medicine will come to play a large role along with modern Western medicine. It would not be an exaggeration to say that our future medicine depends on how well traditional knowledge could be applied.

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