<PANEL DISCUSSION>

1. GERONTOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN JAPAN —In Training of Social Welfare Personnel and Nurses—

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Abstract. Though Japan is noted for the custom of respect for the elderly, gerontological education is not widely practiced. At present it is only done in the training of several professionals and semi-professionals in health and welfare services for the elderly, i.e., medical doctors, nurses, social workers, and care workers for the disabled and older persons.

In the training of social workers who are expected to serve as the pivot of a team for psycho-social help and caregiving, gerontological education is given as a part of social work education.

In schools for care workers for the disabled and older persons that are two-year vocational schools, practical gerontological knowledge and skills needed in the care of the elderly are taught as an important base for their future work.

In schools of nursing, most of which are two-year or three-year vocational schools in Japan, gerontological education is included as an indispensable component of the curriculum and is being given increasing importance these days.

Key words: Undergraduate level, Postgraduate level, Social workers, Care workers, Nurses
(Jpn J Geriat 29: 365—367, 1992)

Gerontology in the Training of Social Welfare Personnel

Undergraduate level

In Japanese undergraduate education, gerontology is only taught in connection with social work education, though its title is almost always “welfare of the elderly”, and its content is naturally limited.

According to the order of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, applicants for the National Examination of Registered Social Workers should be a graduate of a four-year college or university who have obtained the credits in all the thirteen designated subjects including “welfare of the elderly”. Therefore, every department or section of social welfare in the Japanese colleges or universities now includes it in their curriculum. According to the Circular of the Ministry of Health and Welfare regarding the content of the designated subjects, the content of “welfare of the elderly” should roughly be follows.

1. Aging society and the elderly

- 1) Aging and the elderly
- 2) Family and the elderly
- 3) Society and the elderly

2. Welfare of the elderly in the contemporary

society

- 1) Development of the philosophy of the “welfare of the elderly”
- 2) Concept and boundary of the “welfare of the elderly”
- 3) Role and meaning of social welfare services for the elderly
 3. Methods and techniques to be used in identifying the welfare needs of the elderly
 4. Purposes, beneficiaries, and service systems of legislation related to the well-being of the elderly
- 1) The Law for the welfare of the elderly
- 2) The law for the health promotion and health care of older persons
- 3) Other related laws
 5. Welfare services for the elderly
- 1) Community care services
- 2) Institutional care services
6. Roles, *raison-d'être*, and the present conditions of proprietary services for the elderly
7. Professions and agencies working in services for the elderly and cooperation among them.
 - 1) Agencies and professions
 - 2) Cooperation among related agencies and professions
8. Improvement of physical conditions of community and living environments, as well as instru-

ments and devices designed to help physically impaired and frail persons in their daily life

9. Advice and counseling services for the elderly

Post-graduate level

At post-graduate level, our social work education places emphasis on training for higher level social workers, university teachers, and researchers. Therefore, students usually focus their attention on such specific subjects as psychiatric social work, services for developmentally disabled, social work research, and so forth. In social work education at post-graduate level, the curriculum and the content of each subject are completely left in the hands of each school. The content of "welfare of the elderly" is naturally very different from school to school.

Gerontology education in vocational schools for care workers

In the training of care workers for the disabled and older persons, much more attention is given to gerontology education than in the training of social workers, although only two subjects are directly related to gerontology. They are "welfare of the elderly" and "psychology of the elderly and the disabled".

According to the Order of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the designated schools for care workers for the disabled and older persons must teach all the sixteen designated subjects including "welfare of the elderly".

In light of the increasing importance of the problems of aging society, emphasis is placed on the training for the caregiving to the elderly in most schools. Therefore, a variety of practical gerontological knowledge and skills needed in caregiving are also taught in many other related subjects, though the contents are very limited due to lack of time and due to the purpose of the schools.

The contents of "welfare of the elderly" to be taught in these schools are also laid down in the Circular of the Ministry of Health and Welfare. As they are very similar to the one for the designated courses for the training of social workers in universities and colleges, I will refrain from listing them again here. The same circular also lays down the outline for "psychology of the elderly and the disabled". In relation to the elderly, it suggests that the following items should be included.

*History of the study on aging and the aged

*Understanding of aging

*Psychological theory on aging

*Self-awareness of aging

*Aging and adaptation

*Aging of mental function

*Aging of memory

*Aging of intelligence

*Aging of personality and personality characteristics

*Abnormal psychology in later years (including mental disorders and senile dementia)

*Responses to the welfare needs of the elderly and the disabled

1) Societal responses

2) Individual responses

3) Rehabilitation service

4) Recreation service

5) Advice and counseling services

*Case studies

Gerontological Education in Training of Nurses

In both health care and social welfare services for the elderly, nurses are playing an increasingly important role these days. Thus, in their training, gerontological knowledge and skills needed in the nursing of elderly patients are regarded to be one of the indispensable components in their curriculum.

Japanese training system of nurses places emphasis on education in vocational schools. Unlike social work education, the number of universities or colleges having departments or sections for the training of nurses are much limited. Recently, however, in order to raise the social status of nurses and thereby meet their serious shortage, our national policy is changed to increase the number of colleges and university departments. Already, the openings of several new colleges were approved by the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

According to the standard for the curriculum of the schools for the training of regular nurses that is officially set by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, students are required to study, 3,000 hours to complete the course. Out of these 3,000 hours at least 90 hours must be allotted to the study on "nursing of the elderly". This is approximately one tenths of the total number of hours for lectures. In addition, students are required to spend a substantial part of their field work for the practicum of nursing care of older persons.

The standard cited above does not give the content of "nursing of the elderly". According to one of the

standard texts on this subjects (Kamata, K., 1989), the expected content of this course is much more comprehensive and seems to cover most of the important topics of social and behavioral gerontology and geriatric nursing. This is because the number of hours allotted to gerontological education in the training of regular nurses is approximately three times longer than in the training of social workers.

Summary and Conclusion

Gerontological education is most advanced in medical schools in Japan. In other areas, gerontological education is done in connection with education and training of social welfare personnel and nurses.

Recently, registration system for trained social workers and care workers was introduced as one of the means to meet the shortage of social welfare manpower in aging society. Mainly due to the increasing importance of the problems of aging society, and partly due to the standard for the curriculum of designated schools set by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, much more attention is now given to gerontological education in social work education and in the training of care workers.

In the training of nurses, too, due to the rapidly increasing number of elderly patients in and outside of hospitals, "nursing of elderly patients" has come to be regarded as one of the indispensable subjects in the curriculum of schools for nurses.

One of the shortcomings of gerontological education for social welfare personnel and nurses in Japan is that the levels of training are not adequate. That is, our social work education is mainly done at undergraduate level, and the training of nurses is mostly done in vocational schools.

In order to raise the social status of personnel working in services for the elderly, and thereby meet the welfare and nursing manpower shortage in aging society, serious consideration should be given to the faster increase of the number of higher level educational facilities for social work education and for the training of nurses.

References

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