Embedding Research Culture in Community Hospitals

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To the Editor  Recently, Hibino et al. published an outstanding article on the COVID-19 vaccine, and Dr. Hibino’s work is considered to be important since it can help us to solve research-associated problems that clinical researchers often face in community hospitals (1). Although many clinical questions arise in community hospitals, there is no established public organization supporting research conducted by clinicians in Japan. As clinicians and researchers, many important clinical questions have gone unanswered due to a lack of research elements.

Community hospital-based clinical research faces many obstacles. First, community hospitals prioritize clinical tasks rather than research, rarely allowing clinicians time enough to acquire research knowledge and conduct their own research (2). Next, community hospitals lack experienced researchers with sufficient knowledge of research, collaboration, and ethical frameworks (2). Clinicians therefore tend to conduct solo research and often struggle to gather participants. Finally, most health research funds are allocated to academic institutions, not community hospitals (2, 3).

However, many novel clinical questions with broad potential influence are born out of clinical practice. Internists reportedly raise two clinical questions for every three patients, although they often go unanswered (4). These unanswered questions could improve patient outcomes by filling gaps between medical knowledge and clinical practice (4). Research stemming from these questions should be seamlessly integrated into clinical practice. Community hospitals therefore need a foundation for providing research education, sharing research experience, facilitating research collaboration, and, where possible, distributing financial support.

Community hospital research differs from investigations at academic institutions or big data analyses in dealing directly with inpatients and their data. Gehrke et al. (2019) and Snihur et al. (2020) advocated the importance of community hospital research, reporting advantages including improved local patients outcomes, rapid adoption and high adherence to clinical guidelines, high career satisfaction, stable physician retention, and enhanced medical staff education (2, 3).

The COVID-19 epidemic has called attention to community hospital research, such as that conducted by Hibino et al. (1), and many multicenter clinical studies on COVID-19 have been published. Many novel clinical and research questions arise in community hospitals tackling COVID-19, so community hospital research may contribute to hospital medicine, regional care, and responses to public health crises.

Research networks in Japan, such as the Okinawan Remote Islands Practice Based Research Network, share research knowledge, experience, and encouraging clinical research every month (5). However, these systems mainly support clinic-based clinical research. A similar research network supporting internists and community hospitals would help foster hospital-based clinical research.

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References


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