Greetings

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On September 19, 2015, at the 70th Annual General Assembly, I had the honor of being elected the 10th Chairman of our Society. As the new Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to address you. On April 1, 2014, our organization became a general incorporated association with a new system of directors, composed of the representative director (chairman), vice chairmen, and standing director.

The Society was founded in 1949, just after World War II, by researchers of physical fitness, fatigue, work hygiene and nutrition, who formed the joint research group of the medical section of the former Science Council. I would like to reflect back on the founding of our Society, and then look at national health issues and the situation surrounding exercise and sports today, in my discussion regarding the future management of the Society.

After the Meiji Restoration, Japanese medical scientists who returned from Europe or the United States were dismayed by the considerably poorer posture, physical status, and build of the Japanese people compared to people they encountered abroad. Thus, they launched a campaign for the improvement of physical status and fitness in Japan1). Dr. Motokuro Kawase is considered to be the pioneer of medical research on physical exercise in Japan. After graduating from Boston University School of Medicine, he studied Swedish gymnastics at Boston Normal School of Gymnastics, and returned to Japan in 1900. Upon his return, he was put in charge of physiological hygiene at the Gymnastic School of the Japan Association of Physical Education while working as a physician at Tokyo Tsukiji Hospital (currently known as St. Luke’s International Hospital) and contributed to the promotion of Swedish gymnastics based on theories of physiological anatomy according to his compiled works2). It is believed that medical studies on physical fitness began to be conducted systematically after the establishment of the National Institute of Physical Education in 1924, with Dr. Toyokichi Kita as the first President. The goal of this institute was "to perform exhaustive studies on physical education for the Japanese people as well as other necessary studies for physical education improvement, in order to enhance the physical fitness and psychological efficiency of Japanese." At that time, it was likely that the research was purely intended to improve the physical status, constitution, and health of the Japanese people. This institute was abolished in 1941 and was reestablished in 1960 as the Sports Institute attached to the Physical Education Faculty of Tokyo University of Education. The first President was Dr. Reiji Natori, Professor of Physiology at Jikei University School of Medicine. The Sports Institute survived until the reorganization of the university as the University of Tsukuba.

After the Manchurian Incident in 1931, a research unit on physical fitness was founded in the context of national defense. The Congress on Physical Fitness and Sports Medicine was held on April 4, 1938 as a temporary workshop of the General Assembly of the Japanese Association of Medical Sciences held at Kyoto Imperial University. Until the end of the war, free, active exercise and sport activities were restricted, and research mainly focused on the enhancement of physical build and fitness for the purpose of national defense. During this period, physical fitness medicine, rather than sports medicine, was emphasized as a research priority, as suggested by the enforcement of the National Physical Fitness Act in 1940. It was likely that during this period, research was conducted to strengthen people’s physical fitness in the context of military training.

Just after World War II, faced with the need to promote nutritional research to fight against infectious diseases in the context of lowered physical fitness and resistance among Japanese people, researchers interested in sports medicine (including members of the research teams on physical fitness, fatigue and work hygiene) and the medical section of the Association of Physical Education founded the Japanese Society of Physical Fitness and Sports Medicine. At first, the newly established society had approximately 400 members, most of whom were medical professionals. Afterwards, the Society evolved into an interdisciplinary research group composed of researchers from various fields including medicine, physical sciences, dietetics, and psychology. As of September 19, 2015, there are 4,429 members, consisting of 646 doctors, 1,262 physical education staff, 212 dieticians, 40 nurses,

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Our organization, founded after the war, was originally named the Japanese Society of Sports Medicine in English, because sports medicine played an important role. However, it was renamed the Japanese Society of Physical Fitness and Sports Medicine in 1950. In addition, the annual congress of the Society has been held concurrently with the National Sports Festival starting with the fourth annual congress. (The sixth National Sports Festival was held in Hiroshima City in 1951). Since the annual congress of the Society was held twice in 1955 and 1975, respectively, both the National Sports Festival and the annual congress of the Society celebrated their 70th anniversary this year. The academic journal of our Society was named Tairyoku-Kagaku (The Japanese Journal of Physical Fitness and Sports Medicine) with the hope that the Society would become an interdisciplinary circle of researchers from various fields, not limited to medicine.

Since the 1970s, along with rapid economic growth, life has become richer in terms of food, clothing and shelter, and the main health issues the nation now faces have transitioned from infectious disease-related to chronic diseases, including lifestyle-related diseases. The national goal of improving physical fitness and health set during World War II was revised to encourage people to “maintain their own health.” Since the launch of the first National Health Promotion Campaign in 1978, a series of health-promoting measures have been proposed. In 2002, the Health Promotion Law was promulgated. Article 2 of this law states that “it is the people’s responsibility to deepen interest in and understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle, to remain aware of their own health status, and to make efforts to improve their health throughout their life.” In addition, the certification system for health promotion facilities was started in 1988 under an initiative of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, with 327 certified facilities as of April 2015. The Japan Health Promotion & Fitness Foundation trains exercise trainers; as of April 2015, a total of about 38,000 people, either health fitness programmers or health practice leaders, have been trained. Moreover, in July 2012, measures for the fourth National Health Promotion Campaign were proposed in the framework for the second term of the National Health Promotion Movement in the Twenty-first Century (Health Japan 21).

Extension of healthy life expectancy remains the main objective. Despite these numerous measures for health promotion, recognition of health promotion facilities, and training of exercise trainers, there is a lack of physical exercise in people during the prime of life, and the number of patients who suffer from lifestyle-related diseases including obesity, diabetes, and arteriosclerosis, or from locomotive syndrome or dementia, due to aging is increasing, putting more economical burden on the health system in terms of medical and nursing costs. It is widely known that habituation of exercise from an early age is a valid way to reduce factors that degrade health. However, according to a national nutritional survey conducted in 2015, only 13.1 - 24.1% of males and 12.9 - 20.7% of females between 20 to 59 years of age exercise habitually. Since these figures jump to over 35% for both males and females at age 60 or higher, it is likely that current Japanese work conditions make it difficult to exercise regularly. Although health promotion has been put in place with respect for personal autonomy while encouraging individuals to maintain their own health, there are conditions that are difficult to overcome through individual efforts, including work conditions. Measures such as the New Health Frontier Strategy, intended to “extend people’s healthy life expectancy in order to build a bright and vigorous society where everyone can live actively throughout their life, in a country turning into an ultra-aging society,” seem less convincing under the present social and environmental circumstances from the perspective of work conditions. We plan to help local branches of the Japanese Society of Physical Fitness and Sports Medicine hold public lectures for citizens to emphasize the importance of maintaining the environment (facilities) for health promotion activities, promote behavioral medical approaches aimed at encouraging individuals to modify their behaviors, and explain the necessity of physical exercise throughout the different stages of life, from childhood to old age. Moreover, in order to avoid detriments to health caused by the abundance of sometimes-conflicting health information transmitted by the mass media or various kinds of health industries, I think we should start providing accurate health information through our publications and other means.

As the new chairman, I would like to place special emphasis on the following activities.

1. Journal activities

We publish our journal Tairyoku-Kagaku (The Japanese Journal of Physical Fitness and Sports Medicine) six times a year. We have now published Volume 64, No. 5, as of October 1, 2015. The English-language Journal of Physical Fitness and Sports Medicine: JPFSM was first published on May 25, 2012, and Volume 4, No. 4 has just come out (as of September 25, 2015). It had long been our desire to publish academic journals in English. The goal of JPFSM is to widely disseminate the research achievements in physical fitness and sports medicine in Japan abroad, in order to contribute to health and physical fitness promotion, as well as to inform the public around the world of the high standards of research by our members. However, according to Thomson Reuters, while 162 articles were published in JPFSM between 2012 and 2013, only 17 citations were made during the same period, which did not fulfill the condition for the journal to be covered in Thomson Reuters’ journal list. Although the number of published articles has been increasing, there are still only a small number of original articles accepted.
as of September 2015. Most published articles are full-length or short reviews. However, there are brighter signs. According to J-STAGE (Japan Science and Technology Information Aggregator), JPFSM was accessed 20,224 times throughout the year 2014, but this jumped 3.5-fold to 70,772 times in 2015. However, we should continue our efforts to promote contributions not only from our members but also from researchers in Southeast Asia.

2. Academic publications

At present, our Editorial Committee publishes the translated version of the *Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription* (8th edition) by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) through Nankodo. However, we have not issued our own academic publications except for bulletins since our publication of “Sports Medicine – Basics and Clinical Practices” in 1998, with Asakura Shoten. Nevertheless, we have accumulated an enormous amount of knowledge on health sciences related to exercise and sports. Given that one of our roles is to widely inform the public with such resources, we are planning to launch an academic publication. We will target clinicians as the main audience. The medical education curriculum in our country has very little content on physical exercise or health and exercise guidance. Therefore, to promote graduate medical education for clinicians, we plan to put out an academic publication that could serve as a guide on exercise for clinicians.

3. Research ethics

On January 1, 2000, we stopped accepting papers without approval by the Ethics Committee of the contributor’s organization. JPFSM has had the same policy since it was launched in October 2012. As of today, eight articles have been returned to the contributors after submission (4 articles from abroad and 4 from Japan). According to Article 3-(1) of the Ethics Code revised on May 15, 2015, review should be performed if there is a request for review from members of the Society. If there is no research Ethics Committee in place in the potential contributor’s organization, as in the case of some private associations or various sport facilities, the Code states that it is possible to request an ethics review by our Society’s Ethics Committee. However, the Committee does not receive requests for ethics reviews at the moment. We should become prepared to respond to requests for ethics reviews according to the regulations of our Ethics Committee.

4. Relationships with societies of clinical medicine

The External Relations Committee of the Society pursues cooperation with other societies in clinical medicine. The Japanese Society of Physical Fitness and Sports Medicine is the only academic organization in Japan that promotes medical and scientific research for health maintenance and promotion through physical exercise. I believe that ensuring that our research achievements will be used by societies of clinical medicine is a priority for our organization. We should reflect on our past activities, in which we have not put so much emphasis on this topic. We would like to issue an academic publication for clinicians, as mentioned earlier.

5. Support for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games

While preparing for the 18th Olympic Games held in Tokyo in 1964, the Headquarters for the Reinforcement of Tokyo Olympic Athletes was established in 1960. Members of the Japanese Society of Physical Fitness and Sports Medicine of the day joined the Sports Science Committee. The Japan Institute of Sports Sciences (JISS) was established in April 2001 in order to improve the skills of Japanese athletes. Things have changed considerably since the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964, when everything was still under development. Although we do not plan to conduct research projects aimed at improving the skills of athletes for the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games scheduled for 2020, unless there are specific requests from athletic organizations, we are considering holding some international meetings on sports medicine during the preceding year, in order to ensure opportunities for members to present research achievements on health and sports science.

In addition, we intend to continue efforts to promote gender equality and interdisciplinary and international cooperation between academic societies. We hope our members will continue to support and cooperate with us.

References


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