

Greetings

Mental health promotion with an eye toward the upstream

Miyagi Prefecture Mental Health and Welfare Association
Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center

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Miyagi Prefecture has designated a total of 15 years for our Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center activities. Now that 13 years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, only less than two years of activities remain. We are truly grateful for your ongoing support.

We have worked toward individual support for people affected by disasters but are also involved in group recovery of entire communities. When thinking about group health promotion, public health must be oriented toward not only the downstream issues but also upstream to address their root causes.

Efforts by Tanita Corporation are often cited as good examples of health measures. When Tanita noticed that the medical expenses of its employees were high, they thought of ways to improve the health of all employees. The simple idea was to focus on conducting health checks for employees and providing health guidance based on the results. Tanita not only offered simple health guidance but also reformed the employee cafeteria. They created healthy menus that employees would not find boring, placed scales on the meal ticket machines to measure the amount of rice served, and created buttons on the meal ticket machines that allowed employees to purchase the company's own health meter. This resulted in the total medical expenses of employees decreasing by about 2.7 million JPY from 2011 to 2012. The company successfully made employees aware of improving their eating habits by creating an engaging and enjoyable cafeteria without focusing excessively on health guidance.

Another common phenomenon in health education is that when things are not going well, people tend to shift blame to the individual's ability to manage themselves. When people get stuck, others tend to think, "that person is unhealthy because they eat only what they like." When the reason is deeply considered, the context can be understood: they may live in an environment without nearby stores that sell healthy foods, or they may lack the money to buy vegetables. When the problem is carefully traced upstream, the issues present in that person's living environment come into view. Group health promotion requires efforts that consider spatial design that can be enjoyed by many people.

Rather than focusing only on the issues in front of us and looking for the problem, we should have an "antenna" that can notice the "upstream problems" that exist in the community. Of course, this is quite difficult to achieve. There is nothing more difficult than being aware of your own problems. I think that these same problems exist in mental health promotion in the community. Although we have only a little time left for our activities, we hope to contribute to mental health promotion in the future by not overlooking the upstream issues. We look forward to your continued guidance and encouragement.