

Earthquake

~ 10 Years of “Niigata Mental Health Welfare Association Mental Health Care Center” ~

Niigata Mental Health Welfare Association

Chairman - **Toshiyuki Someya**

The Niigata Mental Health Welfare Association Mental Health Care Center is an area that was hit by two short-term disastrous events: the Niigata Chuetsu Earthquake on October 23, 2004, and the Niigata Chuetsu Offshore Earthquake on July 16, 2007. It has been engaged in mental health care activities for about 10 years in this area. The activities of the center were completed in March 2015.

At the time of the opening, there was little knowledge about how mental health care should be conducted after a disaster, and the center continued activities for the disaster-stricken areas and disaster victims through trial-and-error. However, what has been learned from the victims through the health care activities was irreplaceable and was a valuable resource for mental health care activities in the event of a possible natural disaster.

It is very important to understand the characteristics of the area and the people when supporting affected areas. The area affected by the Chuetsu Earthquake was a depopulated and aging mountainous area with heavy snowfall. It was an area with especially high suicide rates even within the Niigata Prefecture which has a high suicide rate overall. Therefore, “protecting the irreplaceable lives of the victims who had been exposed to a great deal of stress due to the earthquake” has been a set business guideline. Before the Chuetsu Earthquake and the Chuetsu Offshore Earthquake, we continued to work on “Education for Depression and Suicide Prevention,” which had been a taboo in disaster-affected areas. The importance is that it applies not only to the affected areas but also to the general public. Besides, steady outreach activities such as on-site surveys conducted by the center in disaster-stricken areas lead to the early detection and early consultations of persons in need of support and were also very useful for understanding the needs of disaster victims.

The magnitude of the two earthquakes in Niigata and the damage caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake are incomparable. The magnitude of the disaster is irrelevant to mental care activities for victims who have suffered a great loss.

"The impact of the disaster is not the magnitude of the damage, and the loss and grief felt by the individual victims are not the same."

This is what we learned and realized from the victims through our 10 years of activities. For more information on the activities of this center, please refer to “Mental Health Care Center 10 Years of Activities Report Recovering the Heart of our Hometown ~A History of Ten Years in Proximity to Affected Persons~.”

Now, the Miyagi Prefecture is in the regeneration phase of the 10-year recovery plan, but is Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center shifting to mid to long-term support? Recovery efforts continued in the areas affected by the Chuetsu Earthquake, with a focus on mental health measures for local government employees who had peaked in fatigue and mental health training for firefighters. Supporting reconstruction will also result in disaster victims’ support. Just as we did in the past, the Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center has reached their fifth year of activity and is most likely to feel lost sometimes. You are included in the support for supporters, so please do not forget about self-care. We hope that activities such as listening to the silent voices of the victims and staying close to their invisible mental wounds will continue.

Many people affected by the disaster must have completely changed their lives due to the Great East Japan Earthquake. However, I think that being able to live a positive life once again with hope in life may help lead to mental recovery.

We hope everyone in the stricken areas of the Great East Japan Earthquake will be able to live peacefully.