

Chapter 3

Contributions

Reflecting on Kobe's fifth year

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In 1999, the fifth year after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, what we struggled with was closing the care center. From the beginning, it was decided to be a project limited to only five years. In the final year, new consultations could only be accepted in the first six months and the focus had to be on connecting ongoing cases to local supporters. Also, while working, we had to prepare a report for the final year and plan a symposium, and Ms. F, who was the coordinator, also took on the job of being a reference for staff members' new jobs. It took two to three years for newcomers to be recognized by the local network, and when they finally felt accepted, they had to start being conscious about having to leave. Although we feel many things are yet to be done, we might have been able to endure this unfamiliar work and poor conditions because we knew there was an end.

There were also things that we realized towards the end. Looking at the analyses of the contents of consultations, the percentage of PTSD symptoms was fluctuating between 2 and 3% at the beginning. The publicity of PTSD, which was thought to be modest, was overturned by a structured interview conducted by the center in its fourth year. At the time of the survey, most victims with a current diagnosis of PTSD were relatively closely involved with the care center staff. Many people struggled with insomnia and complained about physical complaints, and only 30% were aware of their potential for PTSD. In other words, they did not realize that a trauma reaction was behind their complaints. Later, when staff members were fully aware of the PTSD symptoms, the percentage jumped to 7% in the fifth year. It may be necessary to keep not only the noticeable depressive symptoms and alcohol-related problems in mind but also the trauma reactions.

Recently, some years after the earthquake, some people have visited my clinic with a serious case of PTSD. Their common feature is that they have skillfully and stubbornly avoided reminders of the disaster in their daily lives. Some were exposed to reports of the floods of the Great East Japan Earthquake, others experienced bereavement and harassment, and the trapped trauma revived like a ghost. As time elapses after a disaster and reconstruction begins to progress, the suffering of the victims is forgotten. Outside the stricken areas, critical words will even be heard. One of the missions of those who continue to support disaster victims is to continue to communicate their anguish, which is often veiled.