

# Department of Psychiatry, Tohoku University Graduate School of Medicine / Department of Preventive Psychiatry (joint)

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Preventive Psychiatry (joint)  
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( Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center (MDMHCC) Vice President )

The Tohoku University Department of Psychiatry has conducted support and research following the Great East Japan Earthquake with the Department (including the psychiatry disciplines and the hospital psychiatry fields) as a unit, primarily through the Department of Preventative Psychiatry (henceforth, “prevention workshop”) established in October 2011 due to sponsorship from Miyagi prefecture. The primary active members for FY 2015 include Drs. Takahashi, Shoji, Nagao, Abe, Mitate, and Saito from the Department of Preventative Psychiatry; Drs. Matsuoka, Matsumoto, and Ueda from the Department of Psychiatry; and Drs. Katsura and Sakuma from the Department of Hospital Psychiatry. Many of our activities have been conducted with the coordination and cooperation of the Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center and our staff is active at the center as part-time staff members as well.

One important criterion for current activities is the health surveys and supports for individuals working in municipalities within disaster areas, social welfare councils, and hospitals. In addition to regular health surveys, these individuals conduct workplace health consultations, advise representatives, and conduct training for staff members. These local caregivers have been engaged in difficult recovery work and victim support for long periods since the disaster and are under chronic levels of stress. Additionally, they are also victims themselves and many of them have experienced emotional difficulties and loss due to the disaster. One distinct characteristic among the consultation duties of this year was that four years after the disaster, there has been a small but not insignificant number of individuals who have finally opened up to and consulted with caregivers regarding their traumatic experiences. There are many individuals whose trauma has not recovered despite the passage of time and we have keenly felt the importance of providing ongoing support for these individuals. Stress-check systems start in earnest in 2016, so the format of mental health measures in each workplace will significantly change. In these environments, a future challenge is to evaluate what post-disaster support can do for individuals.

Another important criterion for our activities is the development and spread of intervention methods that are useful for the prevention of poor mental health or mental illness. One of these is the feasibility and spread of the support program “Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR)”, which is a support program in collaboration with the Hyogo Prefecture Mental Health Care Center that specializes in disaster recovery periods. This program involves up to five individual interviews based on cognitive behavioral therapy approaches. We believe that regional public health nurses and supporters should ideally provide these programs in the future and we have been focusing our efforts on its education and popularization, including conducting training programs for specialized staff such as public health nurses and psychologists and creating DVDs as teaching materials to learn skills. In 2016 as well, we plan to conduct case study investigations in disaster areas and workshops where we invite SPR trainers.

An additional criterion is the “Workshop on mental exercise”, which is a workshop meant for the general

public conducted with the collaboration of the National Center for Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Research within the Incorporated Administrative Agency (currently, national research and development agency) National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry. In 2015, we conducted randomized controlled trials to test the effect of these workshops and the results are currently being processed. In 2016, we plan to host workshops for the support-based general public but many caregivers participate in these workshops as well, so we plan to host these with training content intended for these care workers. Additionally, we have focused our efforts on the spread of cognitive-behavioral approaches within Miyagi prefecture as well and we hosted the “Psychological support skills improvement lecture” with the Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center. For 2016, we are recruiting new participants by including cognitive behavioral therapy workshops that are intended for beginners.

In 2015, we also focused our efforts on mental health training programs designed for school teachers to improve the mental health of younger individuals. We conducted workshops for teachers in high schools and professional schools in collaboration with projects conducted by Miyagi prefecture and Aoba ward in Sendai city to increase the knowledge and support towards mental illnesses and to improve communication skills between students, parents, and teachers. Additionally, we regularly attended Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center research group conferences and we provided support for research projects and collaborated with investigative projects in the same center.

Other than these, we have also actively cooperated with the mental health projects of municipalities in the Miyagi prefecture as well as shared information and raised public awareness in and outside of Miyagi prefecture, serving as workshop lecturers at suicide prevention project and workplace mental health courses in the Miyagi prefecture and providing reports on the current status of mental health in disaster-struck areas and on research results during conferences and symposia. The present workshop was the focus in December 2014 and the 19th Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society for Prevention and Early Intervention in Psychiatry was hosted in Sendai, where we were involved in sessions from the perspective of preventative psychiatry, including post-disaster support activities. We have also made remarks on initiatives for future disaster countermeasures through our activities in committee meetings and review meetings relating to national disaster measures, which include Miyagi prefecture.

For the future, we believe that activities that summarize the know-how of Miyagi prefecture, which experienced the Great East Japan Earthquake and apply them to future support systems; the development of mental trauma specialists in Miyagi prefecture; the expansion of specialized diagnoses; and initiatives that raise public awareness as important challenges regarding the nature of support following large-scale disasters under the Disaster Psychiatric Assistance Team (DPAT) system whose new issues have become apparent with the responses to the Kumamoto earthquakes and we have taken concrete steps to initiate these activities. We believe that the challenge of applying the lessons and experiences that we have gained due to a large amount of support following the Great East Japan Earthquake for the future is one way that associates in the Miyagi prefecture can return the favor to the rest of the country.

We would like to continue contributing to recovery in the mental health fields of Miyagi Prefecture from a long-term perspective by cooperating and collaborating with the Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center (MDMHCC) to address these challenges.