

# Part III

## Contributions

## Panel discussion in New York

Medical Corporation / Hara Clinic / Director  
the Natural Disaster Mental Health Care Network Miyagi  
Karakoro Station Representative Director

**Keizo Hara**

(Miyagi Disaster Mental Health Care Center Advisor)

On March 8th, 2016, a panel discussion on the theme of “March 11th and September 11th: Survivor stories”, sponsored by the Asia Society, was held in New York. Meetings with the September 11th (World Trade Center attacks) Families’ Association have been held in Ishinomaki City, so the association decided to participate in a panel discussion in New York. There was a total of six panelists, with three from the United States and three from Japan, including myself. The panel discussion progressed with a well-known journalist presiding as the chair. One element that left an impression was the statement made by the 9/11 member, who stated that “recovering from a disaster takes a long time. It’s important to have partners who can support each other”. It was my first time visiting New York. I have been to the West Coast, but it takes another 6 hours to fly to the East Coast from there. It takes approximately 14 hours by plane from Japan. I left Narita in the morning, and I arrived in New York the same morning. I was jet-lagged. That evening, I went to a 3/11 (Great East Japan Earthquake) memorial service. There were many individuals in attendance.

In thinking long and hard on what to write after being requested to write this contribution, my deadline for submitting this passed me by. I promised my editor that I would submit this by April 18th and spent the past week dwelling on this. There was a massive earthquake in Kumamoto. Another one in Ecuador. And on the news, there was non-stop coverage of both of these events. I was reminded of March 11th. On that day, my morning clinical work had finished at 1:30 pm. I had eaten my lunch, played table tennis at the Psychiatry daycare, and was preparing for my afternoon clinical work that was to start at 3:00 pm, ordering coffee in the café on the first floor. It was at that moment. A heavy shaking struck us, I heard the building creaking, and there was shaking so intense that I couldn’t even register the sound of things falling. I had this fear of the building collapsing, but I couldn’t move, I couldn’t do anything. Images of the day the earthquake struck were plastered on the television screen. And images of people seeking shelter or water, rescue scenes, the collapsing of buildings, and so on. Japan is a country that has seen many disasters. After experiencing 3/11, I couldn’t help but feel that something must be learned from this. But there are many different disaster conditions, and the same thing will never happen twice.

I want to introduce the activities of the Mind and Body Station (henceforth, “Karakoro Station”). Shortly after the Great East Japan Earthquake, I began mental care activities in Sendai City, Yamamoto Town, and Ishinomaki City in collaboration with the Japanese Association of Neuro-Psychiatric Clinics. It was clear that it was a large-scale disaster over a wide geographic area and that problems that cannot be handled with regular mental health activities will occur. It was clear that eventually, a disaster mental health care center would need to be established in the region. However, even as we prepared, it gradually became clear that we would need time to establish the center and upon deciding to do what we could do at that moment, we prepared to launch a general incorporated association, and we received approval by the end of June. This was the Natural Disaster mental health care network Miyagi. Using this as a port of entry, we began to accept contract work for activities in Ishinomaki City and Miyagi Prefecture. Shelters in Sendai City and Ishinomaki City were closed at the end of July and October, respectively, and individuals were relocated to container type temporary housing. The activities of the Disaster Relief Act ended once the shelters were closed. In the Ishinomaki region, the Natural Disaster Mental Health Care Network Miyagi took up this role, with mental care teams from various prefectures working in the disaster area taking up individuals undergoing follow-up inspections and we were able to avoid a situation where there was no central organization. In October of the same year, we established the Karakoro Station in front of Ishinomaki station. The Karakoro station conducts activities 365 days a year. Particularly on holidays, during which many institutions are closed, the station continues to conduct follow-up work in the region. The main

activities of the Karakoro station include direct support such as telephone consultations, walk-in consultations, and visits, as well as café activities, lectures, and health consultation meetings, and have a system in place to respond to a wide range of consultations.

I would like to address some mid- and long-term challenges in the future. The current status of the disaster area is that relocations to recovery housing are slow to progress. Health disorders are also becoming a large problem. There are major challenges such as the exacerbation of alcohol-related problems and dementia, and there has been an increase in suicide and anxiety. However, the mental health activities at the Karakoro Station are currently engaged in seeking to find a solution to these problems. With regards to alcohol-related problems, we created Al-Col Karuta as a tool for public awareness activities. We periodically hosted “Ojikoro” events as group activities focused on single elderly people. Additionally, we provided psychological education programs on a regional basis for individuals with alcohol-related problems. We hosted research meetings on alcohol-related problems with regional physicians. It is possible to strengthen mental health activity networks under this type of cooperation. Mid- and long-term challenges are based on how we can expand local mental health networks. Right now, Ishinomaki is trying to establish comprehensive community care. It is thought that strengthening the connections with these types of actions will strengthen the region. Continuity is the father of success.