

## Humanitarianism and the JMA

—In memory of Dr. Albert Schweitzer and Dr. Taro Takemi—

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Masami ISHII<sup>1</sup>

After becoming president of the Japan Medical Association (JMA), Dr. Taro Takemi invited Dr. Albert Schweitzer in Lambarene, Africa, to attend the upcoming general assembly of the Japan Medical Congress in 1959. Dr. Schweitzer's reply was not completely positive. Nevertheless, his response contained not only an apology for not visiting Japan, which had been recently defeated in World War II and was in the process of recovery, but also a message regarding the core of his humanitarianism.

His entire message reads as follows:

Message:

It is to be delighted that the General Assembly of Japan Medical Congress intends to take up the enhancement of humanitarian spirits and physicians' mission in this way as one of its main themes.

I should have been much delighted if I could have attended these discussions myself. To my regret, however, some unavoidable circumstances have prevented me from leaving Lambarene.

I believe sincerely that we physicians bound to make the utmost effort for maintenance of life must inspire people with regard for dignity of life, and thereby we have a special mission to improve humankind mentally and ethically. And I am also firmly convinced that this higher spirit will lead up to possibilities of humankind to understand and solve many difficult problems of contemporary times.

Albert SCHWEITZER  
April 1959

Following World War II, the JMA was forced to disband by the General Headquarters (GHQ)

of occupied Japan and then reassembled as an association with voluntarily membership instead of compulsory membership as before as part of the process of reestablishing a democratic government in Japan. The JMA was allowed to formally join the World Medical Association (WMA) in 1951. Against this background, Dr. Taro Takemi was elected as president of the JMA in 1957. He later wrote about his original concept for building up the global contributions of the JMA as the first step towards enhancing the voices of Asian countries within the WMA, WHO and ILO and considerably advancing their contributions to the global arena.

With Asian colleagues, Dr. Takemi made tremendous efforts to create the Confederation of Medical Associations in Asia and Oceania (CMAAO), which was had virtually been established by 1958. To bring together the voices of Asian medical associations, the Asian Medical Journal was published with the support of the JMA; this journal was modified and eventually took its current form as the Japan Medical Association Journal (JMAJ), continuing its mission to make a global contribution.

It was at this time that the invitation was sent to Dr. Albert Schweitzer, a recipient of the Nobel Prize for Peace who devoted his whole life to humanitarian activities as a physician in Africa and was also well-known as a music scholar and organist who studied the music of Johan Sebastian Bach.

In his response to the JMA's invitation shown above, especially in the message's latter half, Dr. Schweitzer emphasized the special mission of physicians to improve humankind mentally and ethically and lead to possibilities for humankind

<sup>1</sup> Editor-in-Chief, JMA Journal, Executive Board Member, Japan Medical Association, Tokyo, Japan (jmaintl@po.med.or.jp). Vice-Chair of Council, World Medical Association. Secretary General, Confederation of Medical Associations in Asia and Oceania.

to understand and solve many difficult issues for contemporary times in reference to the main themes of the General Assembly of the Japan Medical Congress at that time—the enhancement of the humanitarian spirit and physicians’ mission.

Even though the “contemporary times” Dr. Schweitzer referred to were the 1950’s, the

themes sound like the themes of our current times. As it was published in the Asian Medical Journal, the precursor of the JMAJ, this special message was conveyed not only to the JMA but also to the global arena. Thus, I sincerely believe there is special significance in mentioning this message again in the JMAJ because of its long-lasting global contribution in itself.