

## Home Medical Care That a Local Medical Association Works On: The Case of Itabashi Medical Association, Tokyo, Japan\*<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Home care has been promoted nationwide in Japan in order to provide necessary medical care for people in a familiar living environment. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2006, at-home long-term care support clinics were newly established as part of the national social insurance medical fee system. Recently, home medical care has come to be recognized as the third field in medical care, after ambulatory care and in-hospital medical care.

People's attention tends to focus on the unique characteristics of being treated as patients at home rather than the care they receive at medical institutions. Since physicians in general medicine, practicing at hospitals, clinics, or patient's homes, are responsible for community medicine and people's health and general welfare, home medical care should have been included in the practice of general physicians. The location of their practice may vary, but the nature of home physicians is undeniably a "family doctor" trusted by patients. Therefore, it is the authors' belief that various activities that a local medical association can provide for health professionals, multidisciplinary staff, home care patients, and their families are directly linked to home care support.

This paper introduces the main projects of Itabashi Medical Association relating to home medical care support. Before proceeding further, the authors would first point out that our projects

do not distinguish between physicians in outpatient care and those in home care.

Itabashi City in Tokyo has a population of 530,000, and 21% of the population is over 65 years old. A mega apartment complex was built 40 years ago in the Takashimadaira area in the city, and many of its residents are early-stage elderly (ages 65-74). The proportion of *elderly-only households* in this community will reach its peak in the near future, just as in many other areas in Tokyo. Itabashi City is rich in medical resources; there are over 30 hospitals, including 2 university hospitals and 2 former Tokyo metropolitan hospitals, as well as many private clinics.

Itabashi Medical Association supervises all these medical institutions in Itabashi City, and only we have a medical association hospital among the Tokyo's 23 special wards. We also have the Itabashi Medical Association Home Medical Care Center, which integrates various home care departments (including a comprehensive community support center, an at-home long-term care support office, a home-visit nursing station, and a medical care counseling room). We had foreseen the need for multidisciplinary collaboration, so we started promoting home medical care years ago and have been carrying out projects that support both medical treatment and long-term care at home. By the end of FY2012, Itabashi Medical Association successfully completed the government project in pro-

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moting home care collaboration bases (within the reconstructed budget framework), which was initiated by Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW).

## Preparing Home Care Infrastructure

### Building a collaboration system between acute, chronic, and end-of-life care

#### Regular collaboration/liaison meetings with hospitals

A regular collaboration and liaison meeting is being held in order to exchange information with the 4 major hospitals in the city (Nihon University Itabashi Hospital, Teikyo University Hospital, Tokyo Metropolitan Geriatric Hospital and Institute of Gerontology, and Toshima Hospital). This meeting has become an important place for constructing a medical network for preparing a patient's discharge or admitting an acute patient.

#### Dementia management

Dementia care occupies a great proportion of home care, so we provide regular training sessions for dealing with forgetfulness. Family physicians bear the main responsibility for early detection, early treatment, and care support. These training sessions are also helpful in collaborating with dementia specialists in the city.

#### Seminars on opinion letters of attending physicians for long-term care insurance service

We visit the aforementioned 4 major hospitals in the city and provide awareness-raising activities about filling out opinion letters for the patients. Inpatients may encounter problems in their daily lives after being discharged from hospitals. We believe that informing hospital physicians who are discharging potential home care patients about such difficulties will lead to the provision of practical support when preparing discharge. Furthermore, residents who are accepted under the community medicine training program are required to audit a board meeting for approving applicants for the long-term care insurance service.

#### Workshops in cancer care

Regular workshops to review case studies are held for physicians of Itabashi City Cancer Care Collaboration Core Hospitals, family physicians, visiting nurses, and other relevant staff, in order to support cancer patient care (e.g., anti-cancer drug treatment, palliative care, end-of-life care, etc.). This workshop has been beneficial for

all parties, providing opportunities to exchange information that is useful for patient care.

### Building multidisciplinary collaboration

#### Community medicine workshops

We invite lecturers from various fields and offer workshops for multidisciplinary professions. The themes of the workshops vary each time, and include topics such as dementia, cancer, rehabilitation, and information about prescription drugs.

#### Itabashi Medical Association Medical Society meetings

Itabashi Medical Association Medical Society offers an annual academic meeting. Participants from various fields can join this meeting. A symposium is also held, with a different theme each year, in which multidisciplinary participants can share.

#### Home Care Network Forum

A multidisciplinary forum for a network of over 10 different occupations is regularly held. Family physicians, hospital physicians, dentists, nurses, physical therapists, pharmacists, social workers, staff from long-term care institutions, support specialists for long-term care services, staff from comprehensive community centers, and representatives from the public administration, gather and discuss a different topic each time. Each occupation group takes turns to plan the gathering, decide the topic, and hold the event. Each group, such as hospital staff, home care staff, or long-term care institution staff, proposes a topic based on the challenges that they face in each field. These social gatherings have enabled a multifaceted approach and realized a collaboration in which the parties involved can actually meet face to face.

#### Preparation of a list and map of home care resources and available functions

We have prepared a list and map of medical resources, including physicians, dentists, and pharmacists who provide visiting care, home nursing stations, hospitals that can provide home care support, and institutions that are likely to accept patients with high medical needs, as well as their service functions. The list and map are available from our homepage. This list has proven to be useful in the preparation of care plans.

#### Counseling room for home care

We have opened a counseling room for home care services as part of the FY2012 project by

MHLW that aims to promote home care collaboration bases. This counseling room has been successfully serving as a one-stop solution that connects medical and long-term care, allowing a multifaceted approach. The staff members are nurses with experience in care management and visiting nursing or social workers who are licensed specialists in long-term care service support. This allows the staff to assist in home care from the multiple viewpoints of care management, visiting nursing, long-term care, and welfare support.

### **Support for Visiting Physicians and Reducing Their Burden**

#### **Itabashi Medical Association Visiting Physicians Group**

Itabashi Medical Association Visiting Physicians Group was launched to provide frameworks and information that facilitate collaboration and promote participation for visiting physicians throughout the city. In addition to workshops, participating visiting physicians enjoy opportunities to exchange information and refer patients through the use of the mailing list. The network of main attending physicians and assisting physicians, who work at home care support clinics with an enhanced function, also support the Group.

#### **Project for ensuring an inpatient bed for temporary emergency hospitalization for home care patients**

One inpatient bed is always guaranteed at Itabashi Medical Association Hospital under the Itabashi City's project for home care patients in case a patient needs to be temporarily hospitalized in an emergency. The monthly occupancy rate of the bed has been close to 100% almost constantly for months. Ensuring the availability

of beds for emergency care is essential for reducing the anxiety of home care patients.

### **Outreach Programs to Raise the Awareness of Itabashi City Residents**

#### **Open lectures for the residents**

The aforementioned Home Care Network members periodically stage a short play called "pre-discharge conference" as part of their effort to raise awareness about home care among the residents of Itabashi City. This play has been very popular among the residents. The play incorporates information about various occupations that support home care, as well as raising awareness about closing years and end-of-life care. One thing that is worth noting is that the questionnaire survey conducted after the play showed that over 80% of the audience preferred an advance directive.

#### **Questionnaire survey conducted at the Itabashi City Residents' Festival**

Itabashi City holds an annual festival for its residents. A large-scale questionnaire survey with 2,000 participants has been conducted on this occasion as part of our outreach program.

### **Conclusion**

In order to promote home care, the authors believe that it is essential to enrich the infrastructure for home care and reduce the burden on visiting physicians—and above all, we must provide information to the residents and raise their awareness because they are the main players in home care. It is important that medical associations and the public administration work together and continue to strengthen the basis of home care projects.