

Healthy Society Award

– Recognizing Unsung Heroes Who Make the World Better

By Setsuko Hisatsune



Author Setsuko Hisatsune

Symbols of Excellence

Japan's aging population presents many challenges. How can older men and women with severe and difficult health problems, for example, still live in their own homes with dignity as they face the reality of chronic and debilitating disease? Thanks to a wonderful woman, who has provided "home-visit nurses" since 1992, many patients are able to stay in their own homes in the communities they love. Masako Akiyama strives with energy and compassion to expand the horizons of home care, reaching out to those in need.

A courageous young man called Shingo Kawamura has to deal with the challenges of his own severe disability caused by *osteogenesis imperfecta* (OI), which confines him to a wheelchair. But his great belief in life has enabled him to establish a chain of love, understanding and support for those severely disabled. This is "Network OI" which today has evolved into an NPO, the Japanese Skeletal Dysphasia Association, building an international network of patients.

Another vital network, of parental associations, has been established by Nobuaki Kobayashi for those whose sons and daughters suffer incredible diseases and face the daily challenge of sustaining life. Over 40 organizations have now joined this network to further innovative welfare for children and support their families ... a network of life!

Photo: Office for the Healthy Society Award



The author with William C. Weldon, chairman/CEO of Johnson & Johnson, at the second award ceremony in 2005

Former ambassador and National Police Agency chief Takaji Kunimatsu, who survived an assassination attempt in 1995, responded to the request of the doctor who saved his life and worked strongly to expand and invigorate the "Doctor Helicopter" program in Japan. The core of this program is to increase the availability and readiness of helicopters to help those in emergency health situations or life-threatening circumstances get medical care immediately. This is a life-saving network operating throughout Japan.

Professor Shunji Sano, meanwhile, leaves his work at the University of Okayama every year to lead a team of six members to deliver medical services to hospitals throughout Southeast Asia. He is known as the "Hands of God in pediatric cardiac surgery" and helps to carry hope to those beyond national borders.

All these men and women are recipients of a great award established in Japan in 2004 which has achieved nationwide recognition and respect – the Healthy Society Award (HSA).

About the HSA

The goal of this now prestigious award is to seek out men and women in Japan whose activities go beyond the responsibilities of their regular duties and who strive to accomplish wonderful deeds and make the world a better place to live. Often the recipients are relatively unknown outside their own fields of activity, truly "unsung" heroes of life in Japan. Sometimes they are widely recognized but not always for activities that relate to everyone's life. In short, the HSA recognizes those who make a difference and encourages others to follow their great examples. It recognizes such activities by educators, physicians, health care givers and volunteers, and NGO workers, as well as members of government and the bureaucracy at both local and national level.

Supporting Organizations

The HSA is sponsored by the Japanese Nursing Association, upholding its own determination to support the standards of doing good to others, and is co-sponsored by the global health care company Johnson & Johnson Group, which has been active in Japan for over 50 years.

The range of further supporting organizations includes the Japan Medical Association, the Japan Hospital Association and the All Japan Hospital Association, while the annual program for recognition of the award is also supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport,

Science and Technology and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). The support of all these organizations is eloquent testimony to the importance of the HSA and the nobility of its goals.

Since its establishment the HSA has been honored to have a wonderful circle of men and women, themselves outstanding achievers in their lives, who have served as members of the independent panel of judges or of the award's prestigious advisory council.

Independent Panel of Judges

The inaugural panel of judges, whose decision is the sole determinant of recipients, included the late Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, Kayoko Hosokawa, the honorary chairman of Special Olympics Japan, entertainer and philanthropist Mariko Miyagi whose own school, Nemunoki Gakuen, is advancing the well-being of children with handicaps, former MHLW Vice Minister and Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Teijiro Furukawa, and House of Councilor's member Kuniko Inoguchi, former minister for gender equality and social issues.

Among the current judges are former Supreme Court Justice Hiroshi Fukuda, former Chiba Governor Akiko Domoto, former University of Tokyo President Akito Arima, Dr. Fumimaro Takaku, chairman of the Japanese Association of Medical Sciences, former education and justice minister Mayumi Moriyama, former Keio University Professor Sumiko Iwao, and Dr. Yoshitake Yokokura, president of the Japan Medical Association.

The HSA Board is also still blessed to have the active participation of inaugural judge Shigeaki Hinohara, chairman of St. Luke's International Hospital and one of the most admired individuals in Japan.

This is a wonderful foundation of judges for the HSA to have, as they are always eager to examine and study the many nominations they receive, reflecting the increasing concern among leaders in Japan at all levels to reach out and help others.

Recognition by Leaders

Since 2004, an annual presentation banquet in Tokyo has been held for recipients of the award, attended by over 500 leaders from all over Japan including ministers from the ministries supporting the



The banquet of the first award ceremony for the HSA in 2004

event. This year, in further evidence of recognition and support for the HSA, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda welcomed award recipients at the Prime Minister's Office.

Above all, the HSA has been honored by the recognition given recipients by His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Naruhito. The prince has maintained the great tradition of the Imperial Family in reaching out to those in need to encourage efforts to help others recover, renew and rebuild their lives. The prince held an audience at the East Palace with recipients of the award in its inaugural year and has done so on several occasions since then, demonstrating his interest in their wonderful work.

Furthermore, in a special mark of praise for good deeds, the prince attended and spoke at the fifth award banquet. His participation was a wonderful encouragement to all who seek to advance the worthy objectives of the HSA.

The HSA now stands as a significant and important program in Japan, encouraging outstanding deeds to build a healthier society and rewarding the dedicated efforts being made by men and women to help others. These acts need recognition to spur further such activities to benefit all people in Japan. The HSA is a shining example of a program that has succeeded in reaching out to build a better today and still brighter tomorrow, based on the great achievements of people who care and who are the cornerstones of modern Japanese society.

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Setsuko Hisatsune is vice president of the International University of Health and Welfare Graduate School. She is a former president of the Japanese Nursing Association and former professor in the Faculty of Nursing and Medical Care at Keio University.