

# HOSPICE IN JAPAN

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Hospice in Japan has a long history dating back to the 1973 when Dr Tetsuo Kashiwagi, a young psychiatrist, set up a program for care of dying patients at the Yodagawa Christian Hospital in Osaka.

He had visited London and met Dr Cicely Saunders who was Founder and Medical Director of St Christopher's Hospice. She told him that, if she were dying, she would not want a doctor who just sat at her bedside and held her hand. Instead, she would want a doctor who knew how to relieve her symptoms. After hearing this, he decided to also undertake training in internal medicine in order to prepare himself for the work as a palliative care physician.

A Hospice Unit was subsequently opened in the Yodagawa Christian Hospital in 1984. This 21-bed unit is still very highly regarded as a centre of excellence in Japan and many palliative care doctors have had training in this Unit. However, the Yodagawa Christian Hospital Hospice Unit was not the first in Japan. The first Japanese hospice unit had been established in 1981 at the Serai Hospital in Hamamatsu, in Shizuoka Prefecture.

The next landmark in the development of hospice in Japan was in 1989 with the publication of a report on care of the dying patient by the Ministry of Health. This report resulted in National Health Insurance funding being given for accredited palliative care units in 1990. At that time there were only three hospices and one palliative care centre in Japan. There are now over 100 hospice and palliative care units in the country. However, it is estimated that only 3% of patients dying of cancer receive palliative care.

Hospice home care has not yet been widely accepted in Japan. However, many palliative care units conduct outpatient clinics for patients who have been discharged home from hospital.

The word “hospice” has been adopted by the Japanese to describe compassionate care of those with advanced progressive disease. Several organisations have been established to support those working in hospice programs. The Japanese Association of Hospice and Palliative Care Units was registered in 1991, the Japan Society for Palliative Medicine in 1996 and more recently the Japan Hospice Palliative Care Foundation was established in 2001. The Japan Society for Palliative Medicine now has over 1200 members.

Japan has three palliative care journals The Japanese Journal of Hospice and Palliative Care, the Japanese Journal of Palliative Medicine: and a nurses’ journal. A manual for doctors and an excellent book of guidelines for nurses have been published by the Yodogawa Christian Hospital Hospice Unit.

Dr Kashiwagi, who is now Professor of Health Sciences at the Osaka University, continues to be a leader in palliative care in Japan. He is the Chairman of the Japanese Association for Clinical Research on Death and Dying, of the Japanese Society for Palliative Medicine, of the Japanese Association of Hospice and Palliative Care Units and of the Japan Hospice Palliative Care Foundation. He is also the Chairman of the Council of the Asia Pacific Hospice Palliative Care Network.



The Medical Team at Yodogawa Christian Hospital Hospice Unit

In March 2003 Osaka will host the Fifth Asia Pacific Hospice Conference. It is appropriate that this conference will be held in the city where the Japanese hospice movement was born.

Dr Kashiwagi was also important for the development of hospice in Singapore. In 1986, while attending a psychiatry conference in Singapore, he visited St Joseph's Home where Sr Geraldine Tan and the Canossian Sisters had set aside 16 beds for dying patients. A reporter followed him on this visit and subsequently wrote an article in the Life section of the Straits Times about the care being given at St Joseph's Home. This resulted in 144 people writing in to the Straits Time offering to help. The volunteer home care program under the auspices of the Cancer Society grew out of the tea parties held by St Joseph's Home for those who responded to the article. The rest is history!



Dr Tetsuo Kashiwagi with a patient at the Yodogawa Christian Hospital Hospice Unit