

Letter to the Editor

Comment on “Gender Gap in Medicine: Only One Woman Councilor in the Japan Surgical Society”

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Dear the Editor,

In the article (Tomizawa 2015), “Gender Gap in Medicine: Only One Woman Councilor in the Japan Surgical Society,” I absolutely agree with Dr. Yasuko Tomizawa’s point of view that the medical community should do its best to address the issue of gender equality and work-life balance. Joint participation of both men and women in various medical fields in Japan is actually far behind the world standard; and especially in surgical fields, the situation is even more severe, as mentioned by the author.

With the shortage of doctors, particularly surgeons, manpower has become a major social problem in recent years. Another serious problem facing the medical community in Japan is the lack of opportunities available to female doctors to demonstrate their abilities in the clinical field as well as to participate in academic societies. For example, the percentage of female members in the Japanese Society of Pediatric Surgeons (JSPS) currently stands at 15.5% of the number of total members; the total number of the members of JSPS is approximately 2,300. However, the percentage of new female members is approaching 30% of all new members, which is similar to the total percentage of young female doctors in Japan.

As the author mentioned, the JSPS formed a special committee in 2012 to address the issue of gender equality to support the increasing number of female pediatric surgeons. The most important issue initially addressed by this committee was the establishment of a support system for female surgeons who would like to return to their positions as physicians in both clinical and academic fields following pregnancy and delivery. Moreover, this committee considered the idea of joint participation of both sexes, as male and female surgeons should collaboratively commit to all clinical and research activities as well as daily obligations,

such as housework, child care, elderly care, and community service. Therefore, we should make every effort to maintain a good work-life balance to alleviate the workload of pediatric surgeons. To meet these goals, the JSPS formed a permanent committee, the “Work-Life Balance (WLB) Committee,” in 2013 to facilitate further discussion to achieve true gender equality.

This WLB Committee conducted a questionnaire survey of the society members to analyze the current status of gender equality, problems regarding work-life balance, and support system for female doctors. The findings of this survey revealed that the concept of work-life balance has not yet been well accepted by the members, as daily domestic chores, such as housekeeping and child care, were predominantly performed by women; and very few institutions hire a replacement of female doctors who take maternity leave in order to save labor costs or implement policies to shorten working hours or making part-time positions available for doctors who have certain family obligations or other reasons. Moreover, there is a shortage of hospital nurseries, especially for night shifts, and a shortage of nurseries for sick children.

Based on this information, the WLB Committee noted that both male and female doctors needed to understand the concept of gender equality, and that the Committee had to dedicate itself to publicly promoting the issue of gender equality in the medical field, especially among the members of JSPS. The number of female council members of JSPS has increased from 5 to 19 in this decade; the present number of female council members of JSPS is 19. However, to date, the total percentage of females among the council members is only 6%. The WLB Committee organized a special meeting during the Annual JSPS Congress in 2015, where it presented a discussion that introduced a quota system to the election of JSPS council members to ensure that

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a certain percentage of at least 15.5% and at maximum 30% of female doctors would preferentially be elected as council members, in order to promote gender equality. There was no strong opposition to the proposed quota system from the participants. This issue is now more seriously being discussed in the WLB Committee, and the quota system might be implemented by the JSPS in the near future. I believe these activities of the JSPS are in line with the aims of Dr. Yasuko Tomizawa.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Reference

- Tomizawa, Y. (2015) Gender gap in medicine: only one woman councilor in the Japan Surgical Society. *Tohoku J. Exp. Med.*, **235**, 97-102.