Advanced Initiatives in Interprofessional Education in Japan

Japan Interprofessional Working and Education Network

H. Watanabe, M. Koizumi
Editors
Hideomi Watanabe · Misako Koizumi (eds.)

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Deterioration in the quality of health professionals is a big concern in Japan. The deterioration is caused by the fact that in order to respond to a serious shortage, a large number of health workers have been produced rapidly without any effective quality assurance. As a means to improve the quality in health professions, there has been an upsurge of interest in interprofessional education (IPE) in academic institutions around the world. Much has been published on the subject in the last decade, mainly from the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia. Japan, on the other hand, has published relatively little about IPE, in spite of the recognition of its significance by many health-care professionals and medical training institutions. Several Japanese institutions have recently developed and systemically implemented extensive IPE programs, however. The initiatives of these institutions have been approved as Good Practices by the Japanese government, and, as a result, financial support for their IPE programs has been obtained. The Japan Interprofessional Working and Education Network (JIPWEN) was established in June 2008 comprising ten universities.

JIPWEN aims to discuss critical IPE issues together and to present broadly applicable plural models so that institutions interested in the IPE programs can adapt those models to their own academic and social settings. Nowadays, more and more institutions are planning to start IPE activities. JIPWEN advocates and strengthens those activities, because IPE plays an important role in optimizing interprofessional work. JIPWEN does not aim to establish an association, which organizes meetings for open discussion with all educators or preceptors who are interested in IPE, but instead aims to connect them to government health policy planning and international networks. Most JIPWEN activities are planned and implemented in consultation and through cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) [http://jipwen.dept.showa.gunma-u.ac.jp]. JIPWEN is also a member of the Global Health Workforce Alliance (GHWA) [http://www.who.int/workforcealliance/en/].

This book consists of chapters from ten member-universities belonging to JIPWEN. Their programs vary in content, as do their individual backgrounds, goals, methods, modules, student compositions, facilitation systems, and timing of their respective university curricula. Programs of each institution are summarized in Annex 1. Interestingly, the backgrounds commonly depicted in most universities correspond well to the topics described in The World Health Report 2008 issued from WHO. Objectives or goals of the institutions’ IPE programs include promotion of community health care, communication skills, and comprehensive health services. The experience of each institution is relatively brief, from 2 to 12 years, except for the Tokyo Jikeikai Medical University, which started its IPE program...
in 1989. All universities perform assessments of their IPE activities using their original evaluation systems, and most have shown significant results statistically. The purpose of this book is to describe, in detail, the diverse IPE programs implemented at the JIPWEN member institutions, and to provide plural models for the increasing number of institutions aiming to develop their own IPE programs.

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Contents

Preface ................................................................. V
Contributors ......................................................... IX

Encouraging Appreciation of Community Health Care by Consistent Medical Undergraduate Education
Community Health Care Training Beyond the University Hospital for Mutual Understanding Between Medical Students and the Community ......................................................... 1

Interprofessional Education at Niigata University of Health and Welfare Implementation of an Integrated General Seminar and Future Prospects ......................................................... 13
R. Oshiki, A. Magara, E. Hoshino, Y. Nishihara, S. Masegi, E. Watanabe, M. Kaibuchi, Y. Nagai, and H.E. Takahashi

Interprofessional Education Program of the University of Tsukuba: A Program to Develop Interprofessional Competence ......................................................... 23
T. Maeno, A. Takayashiki, T. Maeno, T. Anme, A. Hara, Y. Saeki, O. Urayama, and F. Otsuka

Community-Based Interprofessional Education at Saitama Prefectural University ......................................................... 39

Jikei University School of Medicine: An Interprofessional Medical Education Program ......................................................... 49
O. Fukushima
Interprofessional Education at the Keio University
Faculty of Pharmacy .......................................................... 57
Y. Ehara, Y. Abe, K. Fujimoto, N. Fukushima, S. Iijima, S. Ishikawa,
K. Kishimoto, M. Mochizuki, K. Takahashi, E. Yokota, and S. Kobayashi

Good Practice” Project at Chiba University
Educational Program for Training Autonomous Health
Care Professionals: Human Resource Training Emphasizing
Interprofessional Collaboration ............................................ 65
M. Miyazaki, I. Sakai, T. Majima, I. Ishii, Y. Sekine, M. Tanabe,
M. Asahina, H. Noguchi, N. Ide, and K. Iida (Chiba University
Inohana IPE Working Group)

Interprofessional Team-Based Medical Education Program at Kitasato
University: Collaboration Among 14 Health-Related Professions ...... 75
K. Mizumoto, M. Okamoto, K. Ishii, M. Noshiro, Y. Kuroda, M. Shirataka,
M. Taga, K. Iguchi, H. Ikemoto, and T. Shiba

Becoming Interprofessional at Kobe University .......................... 95
Y. Tamura, Y. Ishikawa, P. Bontje, T. Shirakawa, H. Andou, I. Miyawaki,
K. Watanabe, Y. Miura, R. Ono, K. Hirata, M. Hirai, and K. Seki

Interprofessional Education Initiatives at Gunma University: Simulated
Interprofessional Training for Students of Various Health Science
Professions ................................................................. 113
H. Ogawara, T. Hayashi, Y. Asakawa, K. Iwasaki, T. Matsuda, Y. Abe,
F. Tozato, T. Makino, H. Shinozaki, M. Koizumi, T. Yasukawa, and
H. Watanabe

Annex ................................................................. 130
Subject Index .......................................................... 137
Contributors

Abe, Yoshihiro
Faculty of Pharmacy, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan

Abe, Yumiko
Department of Laboratory Science, School of Health Sciences, Gunma University, Maebashi, Japan

Akashi, Hirofumi
Sapporo Medical University Scholarly Communication Center, Sapporo, Japan

Andou, Hiroshi
Kobe University Graduate School of Health Sciences, Kobe, Japan

Anme, Tokie
School of Nursing, School of Medicine and Medical Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan

Arai, Toshitami
Department of Social Work, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Asahi, Masaya
Department of Social Work, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Asahina, Mayumi
School of Medicine, Graduate School of Medicine, Chiba University, Chiba, Japan

Asakawa, Yasuyoshi
Department of Physical Therapy, School of Health Sciences, Gunma University, Maebashi, Japan

Bontje, Peter
KIPEC (Kobe University Interprofessional Education for Collaborative Working Center), Kobe, Japan

Ehara, Yoshihiro
Faculty of Pharmacy, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan
Fujii, Chiyo
Department of Social Work, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Fujimoto, Kazuko
Faculty of Pharmacy, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan

Fukushima, Noriko
Faculty of Pharmacy, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan

Fukushima, Osamu
Center for Medical Education, Jikei University School of Medicine, Tokyo, Japan

Hara, Akira
School of Medicine, School of Medicine and Medical Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan

Hara, Kazuhiko
Department of Physical Therapy, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Hasegawa, Naomi
Department of Nursing, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Hayashi, Tomoko
Department of Nursing, School of Health Sciences, Gunma University, Maebashi, Japan

Hirai, Midori
Department of Pharmacology, Kobe University Hospital, Kobe, Japan

Hirata, Kenichi
Kobe University, Graduate School of Medicine, Kobe, Japan

Hoshino, Emiko
Department of Social Welfare, Faculty of Social Welfare, Niigata University of Health and Welfare, Niigata, Japan

Ide, Narumi
School of Nursing, Graduate School of Nursing, Chiba University, Chiba, Japan

Iguchi, Kaoru
Kitasato Nursing School, Kitamoto, Japan

Iida, Kieko
School of Nursing, Graduate School of Nursing, Chiba University, Chiba, Japan

Iijima, Shiro
Faculty of Pharmacy, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan
Ikemoto, Hisashi
Education Center, Kitasato University, Sagamihara, Japan

Imai, Kohzoh
Sapporo Medical University, Sapporo, Japan

Inoue, Kazuhsisa
Department of Physical Therapy, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Ishii, Itsuko
Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Graduate School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Chiba University, Chiba, Japan

Ishii, Kunio
School of Pharmacy, Kitasato University, Tokyo, Japan

Ishikawa, Satoko
Faculty of Pharmacy, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan

Ishikawa, Yuichi
Kobe University Graduate School of Health Sciences, Kobe, Japan

Iwasaki, Kiyotaka
Department of Occupational Therapy, School of Health Sciences, Gunma University, Maebashi, Japan

Kaibuchi, Masato
Department of Occupational Therapy, Faculty of Medical Technology, Niigata University of Health and Welfare, Niigata, Japan

Kanemune, Miyuki
Department of Nursing, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Kawamata, Minoru
Department of Physical Therapy, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Kayaba, Kazunori
Department of Health Sciences, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Kishimoto, Keiko
Faculty of Pharmacy, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan

Kobayashi, Shizuko
Faculty of Pharmacy, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan

Koizumi, Misako
Department of Nursing, School of Health Sciences, Gunma University, Maebashi, Japan
Konno, Miki
Department of Nursing, Sapporo Medical University, School of Health Sciences, Sapporo, Japan

Kunisawa, Naoko
Department of Health Sciences, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Kuroda, Yuko
School of Nursing, Kitasato University, Sagamihara, Japan

Maeno, Takami
School of Medicine, School of Medicine and Medical Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan

Maeno, Tetsuhiro
School of Medicine, School of Medicine and Medical Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan

Magara, Akira
Department of Prosthetics & Orthotics and Assistive Technology, Faculty of Medical Technology, Niigata University of Health and Welfare, Niigata, Japan

Majima, Tomoko
School of Nursing, Graduate School of Nursing, Chiba University, Chiba, Japan

Makino, Takatoshi
Department of Nursing, School of Health Sciences, Gunma University, Maebashi, Japan

Maruyama, Tomoko
Sapporo Medical University, School of Health Sciences, Sapporo, Japan

Masegi, Seiya
Department of Health and Sports, Faculty of Health Sciences, Niigata University of Health and Welfare, Niigata, Japan

Matsuda, Tamiko
Department of Nursing, School of Health Sciences, Gunma University, Maebashi, Japan

Miura, Yasushi
Kobe University Graduate School of Health Sciences, Kobe, Japan

Miyawaki, Ikuko
Kobe University Graduate School of Health Sciences, Kobe, Japan

Miyazaki, Misako
School of Nursing, Graduate School of Nursing, Chiba University, Chiba, Japan

Mizumoto, Kiyohisa
Kitasato University, Tokyo, Japan
Mochizuki, Mayumi
Faculty of Pharmacy, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan

Murohashi, Ikuo
Department of Health Sciences, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Nagai, Yoichi
Department of Occupational Therapy, Faculty of Medical Technology, Niigata University of Health and Welfare, Niigata, Japan

Nishihara, Ken
Department of Physical Therapy, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Nishihara, Yasuyuki
Department of Health and Sports, Faculty of Health Sciences, Niigata University of Health and Welfare, Niigata, Japan

Noguchi, Hotaka
School of Medicine, Graduate School of Medicine, Chiba University, Chiba, Japan

Noshiro, Makoto
School of Allied Health Sciences, Kitasato University, Sagamihara, Japan

Ogawa, Kumi
Department of Social Work, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Ogawara, Hatsue
Department of Laboratory Science, School of Health Sciences, Gunma University, Maebashi, Japan

Okamoto, Makito
School of Medicine, Kitasato University, Sagamihara, Japan

Ono, Rei
Kobe University Graduate School of Health Sciences, Kobe, Japan

Oshiki, Rieko
Department of Physiotherapy, Faculty of Medical Technology, Niigata University of Health and Welfare, Niigata, Japan

Otsuka, Fujio
School of Medicine, School of Medicine and Medical Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan

Otsuka, Mariko
Department of Nursing, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan
Saeki, Yuka
School of Nursing, School of Medicine and Medical Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan

Sakada, Takanori
Department of Nursing, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Sakai, Ikuko
School of Nursing, Graduate School of Nursing, Chiba University, Chiba, Japan

Sato, Toshio J.
Department of Educational Development, Sapporo Medical University Center for Medical Education, Japan

Sawada, Izumi
Department of Nursing, Sapporo Medical University, School of Health Sciences, Sapporo, Japan

Seki, Keiko
Kobe University Graduate School of Health Sciences, Kobe, Japan

Sekine, Yuko
Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Graduate School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Chiba University, Chiba, Japan

Shiba, Tadayoshi
Kitasato University, Tokyo, Japan

Shimasue, Noriko
Department of Social Work, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Shimazaki, Midori
Department of Social Work, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Shinmura, Hiromi
Department of Nursing, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Shinozaki, Hiromitsu
Department of Nursing, School of Health Sciences, Gunma University, Maebashi, Japan

Shirakawa, Taku
Kobe University Graduate School of Health Sciences, Kobe, Japan

Shirataka, Masuo
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Kitasato University, Sagamihara, Japan
Sohma, Hitoshi
Department of Educational Development, Sapporo Medical University Center for Medical Education, Sapporo, Japan

Suzuki, Reiko
Department of Nursing, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Taga, Masaki
Kitasato Junior College of Health and Hygienic Sciences, Niigata, Japan

Takahashi, Hideaki E.
Niigata University of Health and Welfare, Niigata, Japan

Takahashi, Kyoko
Faculty of Pharmacy, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan

Takayashiki, Ayumi
School of Medicine, School of Medicine and Medical Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan

Tamura, Yumi
Kobe University Graduate School of Health Sciences, Kobe, Japan

Tanabe, Masahiro
School of Medicine, Graduate School of Medicine, Chiba University, Chiba, Japan

Tano, Rumi
Department of Health Sciences, Saitama Prefectural University School of Health and Social Services, Koshigaya, Japan

Tohse, Noritsugu
Sapporo Medical University School of Medicine, Sapporo, Japan

Tozato, Fusae
Department of Occupational Therapy, School of Health Sciences, Gunma University, Maebashi, Japan

Urayama, Osamu
School of Medical Sciences, School of Medicine and Medical Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Japan

Watanabe, Eikichi
Department of Health and Nutrition, Faculty of Health Sciences, Niigata University of Health and Welfare, Niigata, Japan

Watanabe, Hideomi
Department of Physical Therapy, School of Health Sciences, Gunma University, Maebashi, Japan