

Opening address of President Obama at the Annual Meeting of the American Medical Association (AMA) 2009

It was a valuable moment for me to listen to President Mr. Obama's opening address at the Annual Meeting of the AMA in Chicago in June 2009 because it was actually an important presentation of his reform plan for the American health system to the AMA delegates as key members of the medical profession.

Mr. Obama seemed to be quite sincere to the audience members from all over the US and representing the range of medical fields in this country, with several international guests from the World Medical Association (WMA) as well. The President's comments received hearty applause with repeated standing ovations. He mentioned the emerging risk of the unsustainability of the American health care system with its steeply climbing costs and also spoke of the unacceptable present situation in which some 46 million American are uninsured. He expressed his intention of accomplishing his master plan for the American health system with the cooperation of the AMA members.

There are various issues concerning the health care system with regard to community, public, and global health. There may be various solutions to these, depending on people's geopolitical, economical, and traditional backgrounds. For those involved in planning in the medical field, the most important attitude to have in dealing with these kinds of issues is to base actions on flexible discussions with stakeholders for the betterment of patient care.

I translated the full text of Mr. Obama's speech into Japanese so that we can utilize it in our domestic argument concerning Japan's universal health insurance system that has supported health policy in this country since 1961. We are facing difficulties in health management policy with rapid advances in new therapies, the intro-



Mr. Obama receiving standing ovations

duction of innovative biotechnology into the clinical field, the changing state of well-being with increasing demands for sickness prevention in the aging society, and unbalanced distribution or shortages of medical work forces both internationally and domestically under difficult economic circumstances with conflicts of interest such as between the demand for best care and the generalized health care system or between reducing medical costs and maintaining standards of patient safety. Still, I believe that we have a very big chance to establish agreement on a future health system because we are all in this heavy stormy state in social and economic terms. I felt that it is the time for us to communicate and discuss our various problems first of all amongst medical professions in the international forums such as the WMA.

The above is what I thought listening to the passionate presidential address of Mr. Obama in Chicago.

Masami ISHII, Executive Board Member, Japan Medical Association (jmaintl@po.med.or.jp), Vice-Chair of Council, World Medical Association, Secretary General, Confederation of Medical Associations in Asia and Oceania (CMAAO).