

International Contribution Made by Universities and Medical Schools in Japan

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Taro YAMAMOTO*¹

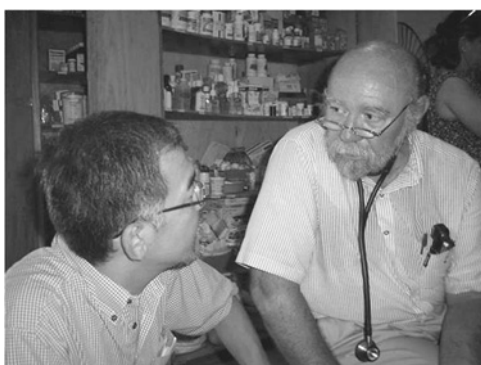
With them being either international or domestic, there are at least three major social roles today that universities, not only medical schools but also any other faculties, have to play: i.e., 1) to conduct outstanding research, 2) to provide quality education, and 3) to take social responsibility. It is certain enough that all of these are important as components of international contribution made by universities.

First, let us consider research. Conducting research is a primary role to be played by universities. It is the most important role where people in universities explore unknown terrain beyond the intellectual horizon of knowledge, expertise, and recognition that we human beings could have gained and extend its borders. Through such activities, new technologies or perspectives, some parts of which can be applied and exerted to help people living in resource-limited settings improve their lifestyles, emerge. Without taking on this challenge actively, the university fails to keep its *raison d'être* as an ivory tower, for good or bad. As far as our department, the Department of International Health, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Nagasaki University, is concerned, we take research as one of the most important pillars among others. Research conducted by our department is composed of following three units: 1) research on epidemiological patterns of infectious diseases located in the current complex ecosystem, with mathematical modeling, 2) research on the impact of the environment, including climate change and Asian dust, on health, and 3) research on the biological evolution of infectious agents from an adaptation or fitness viewpoint. The umbrella concept of these research topics abovementioned is to reconstruct infectious

diseases “temporally” and “spatially” alike. Infection is biological interaction between hosts and microorganisms. In other words, host behavior and social structure as well as culture per se affect microorganisms in fitness and adaptation whereas microorganisms have an impact on their hosts. Based on this perception, our department aims to gain more detailed understanding and insight on infectious diseases and to contribute to international health with it.

Second, we will consider education or human resource development. To provide high-quality education to those who seek it, whether Japanese or of another nationality, and to thus develop their capacity with it is the top priority of the university. Our institute in collaboration with other faculties now has two master courses, Master of Tropical Medicine (MTM) and Master of Public Health (MPH), in one of which foreign students account for more than half and all lectures are provided in English. This environment provides students with a sense of group dynamics. Students can learn from each others' ways of thinking, which are sometimes quite different from culture to culture. This is not in just the case on the master course but on the doctor course, too, where members also come from more than 10 different countries. The impact of these foreign students is not limited only to the university but also to the society or community where the university is located. Internal internationalization in the university is important but at the same time, contribution to the internationalization of communities surrounding the university, for instance from civil servants in the municipality to shop keepers, land owners of foreign students' accommodation, barbers,

*1 Department of International Health, Institute of Tropical Medicine, The Global Center of Excellence, Nagasaki University, Nagasaki, Japan (y-taro@nagasaki-u.ac.jp).



The author (left) and a Dutch doctor at an orphanage in Haiti



Schistosomiasis control in Zimbabwe

etc., seems to be the unconscious role that the university plays. I believe this unconscious role taken by the university is an asset that the university has in its history.

Last but not least, I touch upon social responsibility of the university. Now that even profit-oriented organizations and companies are required to take their corporate social responsibility seriously, academia and universities are of course required to do so. From our department, the Department of International Health, there must be nothing but contribution to global health or people's health in resource-limited settings.

Our department raises the following three activities as international contributions: advocacy on international health at the national and international level through dialogue with government in collaboration with NGOs and civil society in the process of G8 or TICAD (Tokyo International Conference on African Development), in which global health including infectious diseases, maternal and child health, and health system strengthening in developing countries has recently become one of the main agendas; health promotion and empowerment of people, especially women, through a project conducted in collaboration with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) or another implementation body at the community or grassroots level; and international emergency relief. Speaking of emergency relief, I myself was dispatched as a member of Japan's Disaster Relief Team to Haiti hit by a devastating earthquake



Japanese and Vietnamese staff cooking during field activities in Vietnam

where more than two hundred thousand people were estimated to have died and one million people lost their homes and access to safe water and sanitation a couple of months ago. There were uncountable numbers of patients with severe injuries who were thus seeking health care including surgical operations. The medical services provided by the Japan Disaster Relief Team were appreciated by the Haitian people.

What our department thinks of as important in those activities relevant to taking social responsibility is to create solidarity in order to improve people's health and contribute to people's sustainable development. It is our department's goal and at the same time, I believe, it is the goal of international contribution made by universities and medical schools.