



Family Nursing Network: Family Nursing in Japan-A Firsthand Glimpse

In September 1998, I was invited to Japan to present a keynote address at the 5th Annual Conference on Family Nursing. This annual conference is organized by the Japanese Association for Research in Family Nursing that has a membership of over 650 nurses. Dr. Chieko Sugishita of the University of Tokyo has been instrumental in organizing and providing leadership for this interest group. This year the conference was chaired by Dr. Hideko Mori and held at Kitasato University with over 400 practicing nurses, academics, administrators, and graduate students in attendance.

Over the past several years, I have had the pleasure of meeting a number of Japanese nurses who have attended our Family Nursing Unit externship in Calgary. However, this was my first visit to Japan. It was an incredible experience! In addition to the keynote address and advanced practice workshop at Kitasato University, I traveled to Sapporo and Sendai with Dr. Sugishita, where together we offered workshops on family nursing. Thanks to the many kindnesses shown to me by Dr. Sugishita, Dr. Mori, and their faculty colleagues and graduate students, I had a firsthand glimpse of the excitement for family nursing and the advances in the science and practice being made by Japanese nurses. (During my adventure, I also had firsthand experience with an earthquake and a typhoon!)

From the information that was shared with me during my visit, there are approximately 600,000 nurses in Japan and less than 5,000 have a baccalaureate degree. Family nursing has been implicitly practiced for many years within a culture where loyalty to family has long been a core belief along with thrift, hard work, education, respect for hierarchy, and the willingness to place community before self. With the post-World War II shift in Japanese society to smaller nuclear families, increased mobility of family units, a declining birth rate, increased life expectancy, and elderly family members living apart from their extended families, healthcare systems in Japan have recently been challenged to provide services to the more than 20 million Japanese now over the age of 65 (with 10,000 people over the age of 100!). One of the ways the system has responded to this challenge is to recognize the benefits of providing university education for nurses to enable a broader knowledge base and the ability to practice across both institutional and community settings. Beginning with approximately five university nursing programs in the country, the past 5 years have seen an unprecedented expansion to 65 university programs offering all levels of nursing education from baccalaureate through doctoral programs.

The University of Tokyo, under the leadership of Dr. Chieko Sugishita, has led many of the initiatives related to family nursing in Japan. Dr. Sugishita began the Department of Family Nursing at the University of Tokyo in 1992 in response to an invitation from the Ministry of Health to strengthen nursing care provided to families. She amalgamated the once separate areas of maternal child nursing, mental health nursing, and gerontological nursing under the umbrella of the Department of Family Nursing.

A substantial body of published literature related to family nursing has been accumulating (see the appendix for the English translation of these sources). Permission has been obtained to reprint Dr. Sugishita's article on family nursing in this

issue (pp. 239-244), which provides an insider's view of the growth of this specialty area in Japan.

APPENDIX Japanese Family Nursing References (translated to English by Tsune Kasuga)

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VIDEOTAPES

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