



Fukushima symposium: a brief note

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[Editorial]

FUKUSHIMA SYMPOSIUM : A BRIEF NOTE

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Snow rarely falls in March here in Fukushima. Though, on the particular evening that the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant spilled enormous amounts of radioactive materials into the environment, it was snowing.

Fukushima city recorded nearly 20 μ Sv per hour of radiation that night despite being about 60 km away from the plant. The radioactive materials contained in the snow seeped into the ground. This was the same ground that had given the people of Fukushima Prefecture a fruitful life.

From that day on, the accident has been nothing but torture to the people even though radiation levels have dropped to one tenth of the initial levels. The passing of several months has failed to heal the suffering caused by extreme anxiety and the mental crisis of which the people are faced with.

The Fukushima Society of Medical Science, an affiliate of Fukushima Medical University, has been struggling to protect people's health. In July, the society asked a wide variety of experts evaluating the current situation of Fukushima to hold a symposium with the theme of protecting citizens. Because of the size limit of the hall, the audience was restricted to schoolteachers, hospital doctors, journalists, the police and the Self-Defense Forces. The latter mentioned Self-Defense Forces are in direct contact with citizens and are involved in the rescue services. A local radio station later broadcasted the symposium.

An Dr. Naoki Matsuda at Nagasaki University addressed the opening lecture on basics of radiation and general health effects at the symposium. Fukushima Medical University's Dr. Tsuneo Kobayashi, a radiology physicist, gave precious and precise information on environmental radiation

observed at Fukushima Medical University before and after the accident. Also, Dr. Katsuhiko Yamaguchi reported their surveillance of radiation in Fukushima Prefecture by dosimeters laid on a car. Dr. Noboru Takamura, who has been studying the health effects of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident in 1986, summarized his research. As another example of radioactive spillage, Dr. Kenneth Nollet gave a brief talk on his personal experience in the U.S. while growing up.

Concluding the second half of the session, Dr. Tomotaka Sofue, from the National Cancer Institute, explained his approach of evaluating radiation health effects in comparison to various health risks such as smoking, improper food intake or lack of exercise. From a sociology point of view, Dr. Naoya Sekiya analyzed how fear spreads among people often causing otherwise-unnecessary panic. Finally, we heard Dr. Kenji Kamiya, a professor of Hiroshima University and now also vice-president of Fukushima Medical University, talk about the challenges faced in Fukushima during the period of emergency. Professor Kamiya also talked about his studies and other studies concerning the cellular DNA recovery system after radiation injury.

This symposium was our attempt to seek the way to properly estimate the health risk of radiation. As effects of low level radiation has been under debate, we did not seek a clear answer. Rather, we wished citizens to know what was certain and what wasn't. We hope that the symposium provided people in Fukushima Prefecture with an opportunity to consider their health risk based on trustworthy data, and that our experience can be of help to people around the world.