

## **Report on Multinational Senior Community Meeting held on June 27, 2015 Sapporo International Communication Plaza Hospital Procedures and Experiences**

This report is based upon notes taken and provided by a number of participants. The discussion covered a variety of areas concerned with hospitalization in Japan. It was obvious that two hours was not enough time to cover such a broad topic, but the group covered the main aspects quite well and hopefully this report will summarize the points made adequately.

### **119 Emergencies**

Emergency ambulance service is free in Japan. Call 119 using either a mobile or landline phone, and specify if the call is for an ambulance (*kyukyusha*) or to report a fire (*kaji*). If you cannot communicate in Japanese on the phone, there is a system set up to deal with several different languages. Please visit the following link for that information, which is provided by the City of Sapporo.

<https://www.city.sapporo.jp/city/english/emergency/119.html>

In the ambulance you should not expect the paramedics to speak much English, so use gestures for symptoms. In general, depending upon the time of day, location of hospitals that treat your medical condition and your current location, the ambulance will take you to the hospital which will accept your condition. If possible, take along your personal documents (health card, residence ID card, medical history) and a hospital kit which you have hopefully prepared in advance. If you have a personal doctor/hospital where your condition has been treated previously, you can ask the ambulance to take you there, but ultimately it is their decision to make as to which hospital they will go.

### **Off-hour Medical Treatment**

When you require medical treatment during NIGHTTIME hours, on SATURDAY AFTERNOONS and HOLIDAYS, the City of Sapporo has another good website. It provides details on a variety of medical conditions for which you can obtain emergency treatment at times outside of normal working hours. Check the following link for information in Japanese. <https://www.city.sapporo.jp/eisei/tiiki/toban.html>

That leads to an English page <https://www.city.sapporo.jp/city/english/medical-welfare/nighttime.html> that unfortunately does not include the daily schedule of hospitals open for duty at night, weekends and holidays. Therefore, it is recommended to use the Google URL translation link to view the schedule details. Open <https://translate.google.com/> and paste the URL <https://www.city.sapporo.jp/eisei/tiiki/toban.html> in the left side which should be set to Japanese, then translate the page to English. Scroll down for the schedule.

In addition, another very practical and organized website with information in English is <http://www.qq.pref.hokkaido.jp/qq/qq01fnlgsp.asp> which includes a search form to help you find the best hospital to visit with respect to your location and medical condition.

Once you get to the hospital your chance of being able to communicate in your native language improves a little, but most likely it may not be easy. It was pointed out that doctors are quite knowledgeable at reading and writing English, but they often lack communication skills. They rely on the nursing staff to handle such communication. Several people present commented that communication skills include not only verbal but drawing pictures, gestures, facial expressions and most of all human empathy. Nonverbal communication is necessary and usually the hospital staff is good at it. You might require the issuance of a referral letter or recommendation between doctors and/or hospitals. This is a typical procedure and a standard method of how one goes about entering a hospital in Japan.

### **SEMI (Sapporo English Medical Interpreters' Group)**

Communication was a major point for non-Japanese in the audience, even those with Japanese partners, as medical discussions are very technical and difficult to translate and understand. It was highly recommended that if one feels an interpreter is needed a special volunteer group of interpreters in Sapporo is ready to help those in need. Generally contact is made with SEMI through their excellent English website: <http://semi-sapporo.com/> and you can click on the "Contact Us" tab to read about their services and complete an online form for assistance. In addition, you have the option of sending an email message to [SEMIsapporo@gmail.com](mailto:SEMIsapporo@gmail.com). Please check out their homepage which is in English. <http://semi-sapporo.com/>

Other English websites with useful information about Emergency care in English are below. <http://gosapporo.com/living/medical-services/emergency/>  
[http://www.plaza-sapporo.or.jp/plaza\\_sapporolife/en/medical/byouki.html](http://www.plaza-sapporo.or.jp/plaza_sapporolife/en/medical/byouki.html)

### **Non-emergency medical/dental treatment**

The MSC meeting shed a lot of light on the hospital procedures required for normal medical treatment and hospitalization. It was recommended by the speaker that those who are not Japanese visit the Multilingual Living Information website produced by Clair (Council of Local Authorities for International Relations) for which I provide the English link here. <http://www.clair.or.jp/tagengorev/en/f/index.html>. This website provides links to various well-written PDF files on various aspects of medical care. It describes the system whereby most people visit clinics or small medical offices for minor problems or symptoms of what could turn out to be larger problems. You can simply walk into these clinics without an appointment but it will probably take more time to see the doctor. Of course, you will be expected to fill in all of the required forms for medical history, symptoms, etc. The clinic will usually give you an ID card that you can use for future visits. This would amount to having a local doctor in your area. If more advanced investigation or treatment is necessary, the doctor would write a referral letter to a particular doctor/hospital for your illness. You would normally be expected to make an appointment or visit that facility when you are able to do so.

## Medical Forms Available Online

“Health Hokkaido” is an English website with a short summary of the procedures for ‘Visiting the Hospital’ <http://www.healthhokkaido.com/article/hospital.cfm>. They have also put together a series of maps with details about hospitals that they have found to be responsive to non-Japanese patients. It states that the links are to maps of hospitals you can trust. These hospitals have doctors who speak English. [http://www.healthhokkaido.com/hosp\\_maps/google\\_map.cfm](http://www.healthhokkaido.com/hosp_maps/google_map.cfm). In addition, they have created bilingual forms for four categories (dentist, eyes, general and women). <http://www.healthhokkaido.com/forms/form.cfm>. These forms can be printed out, completed at home and taken to the clinic or hospital.

A sample medical history form in English and Japanese was handed out at the meeting. It was suggested that one could complete the form beforehand and take it with you on your first visit. This could certainly save time at the hospital and help to minimize communication problems. These multilingual forms in 18 languages are available at the following link. <http://www.kifjp.org/medical/index.html>. Another website with a simple Medical Examination Form offered in several foreign languages has been organized by AMDA in Tokyo. <http://eng.amda-imic.com/>. The Japanese/English form can be found at the following link: <http://eng.amda-imic.com/modules/report/index.php?page=article&storyid=3> There is also a free medical consulting service which is available by phone at Land line: 0120-20-8699 or from a cell phone: 011-221-8699.

## Outpatient Procedure

The basic procedure for an outpatient visit: 1. Go to the reception/counseling area (*uketsuke*). 2. Fill out any required forms for your medical record (probably required in Japanese so bring someone along to help). 3. See the doctor and complete any tests required. 4. Pay the fees in cash and pick up your next appointment paper from the accounting clerk (*kaikei*).

## Long-term Hospitalization

For hospitalization (*nyuin*), you will receive a lengthy explanation of admission procedures prior to the date you will enter the hospital. You'll also get an orientation by a nurse once you arrive on the entry date. An important point was to prepare a kit at home of the items that are typically needed for an extended hospital stay. In that way, you can be sure to include slippers that fit properly and make sure they are easy to get on and off. Other items include the basics such as toothbrush and toothpaste, cup, towels, etc. If there is no time or one is unable to access the kit, as for a sudden emergency, it is a good idea to inform someone as to where the personal kit is located, and they can bring it later. Otherwise, most hospitals have a place inside where you can purchase a kit with these items, along with some food items. Don't forget your health insurance card (*hokenshyou*) and resident identification card (*gaikokujintouroku*) and of course cash to pay the bill! With regard to hospital fees, there is a maximum amount payable per month, based upon your insurance coverage. Once you reach that amount the rest of that month is basically free. Therefore, it is best to enter a hospital at the start of a month, in order to maximize the full benefit of this system. That system is called (*kougakuryouyouhi*). More information about this can be found in the section on Medical Insurance.

## Hospital Directories and Recommendations

There are some websites which provide directories of clinics, hospitals, pharmacies, etc. for Hokkaido cities. One that has a fairly extensive list is provided by the United States Embassy. Their link is <http://japan.usembassy.gov/e/acs/tacs-sapporodoctors.html>. Go! Sapporo provides directories for hospitals, clinics and dental services, from: <http://gosapporo.com/living/medical-services/emergency/>

One hospital in particular should be mentioned here because it has focused attention on treating foreigners from a variety of countries with hospital staff able to communicate in several languages. Their website provides all details on every aspect of the hospital in English.

[http://www.higashi-tokushukai.or.jp/la\\_en/index.html](http://www.higashi-tokushukai.or.jp/la_en/index.html)

Here is the introduction from the website. "Sapporo Higashi Tokushukai Hospital set up an International Medical Room in April last year, with the vice-director Kitagawa as a head, so that the foreign patients visit our hospital feeling at rest. The staff is assigned for English, Russian, Chinese (Shanghai, Beijing), Spanish, Portuguese, Korean. We respond to the requests from foreign tourists who are in trouble by getting out of their condition while visiting Hokkaido and those who wish to have a medical examination (health screening) and medical care in Japan. In addition, we also support individuals requiring dialysis on a tour."

### Privacy and sharing of patient records

It was noted that there is no hospital sharing of patients records and that it is sometimes very difficult to get your own records. In general, doctors keep records for a five year period before storing them away. With more and more information being stored in computer files, there is some question as to accessibility after a longer period of time for historical purposes, and concern with privacy was expressed. Typically, if you decide to change hospitals or clinics to have another doctor treat you, you will probably be unable to transfer the historical records unless the hospital is the one that recommends that you transfer there. If your own doctor moves to another facility, then you can move along with your records to that new location and continue treatment.

## Medical Insurance

The Expats Guide to Medical Care at <http://expatsguide.jp/ch12> and Japan Healthcare Info (JHI): <http://japanhealthinfo.com/japanese-healthcare-services/japanese-health-insurance/> are recommended.

The most comprehensive NHI Guide can be downloaded at: <http://www.yosida.com/forms/nationalins.pdf>

Also, in July 2015 it was announced that premiums have been set for National Health Insurance. Please click on the following link to view a table which shows how annual premiums are to be calculated.

[http://www.city.sapporo.jp/city/english/news/news201507\\_1e.html](http://www.city.sapporo.jp/city/english/news/news201507_1e.html)

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare provides an English Overview of the Latter-Stage Elderly Healthcare System. <http://www.hokkaidomsc.org/app/download/11629106/Elderly-Healthcare-System.pdf>

The Hokkaido Extended Association, located in Sapporo, is responsible for the operation of the Latter-Stage Elderly Healthcare System in Hokkaido which was introduced in 2008. It is part of the Japanese Universal Healthcare System and it takes effect automatically on one's 75th birthday. News announcements in Japanese, related to the Hokkaido Extended Association can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.iryokouiki-hokkaido.jp/>. There is a very simple summary of the system on page 19 of the NHI Guide, which is included below. The switchover to this system is automatic for anyone who has been enrolled in a qualified Health Insurance system.

#### NHI Guide Summary Description

Insured citizens aged 75 or older (and those aged 65 or older who have specific disabilities) will receive medical care under the Long Life Medical Care System (the Insurance System for Latter-Stage Elderly People). On reaching the age of 75 (i.e. on the day of their 75th birthday, or in the case of those aged between 65 and 74 (inclusive) who have specific disabilities, on the day they receive recognition of their disability from the regional council), current NHI members will no longer be covered by the NHI system; they will be covered by the Long Life Medical Care System (the Insurance System for Latter-Stage Elderly People). All eligible parties (members) are required to pay premiums; even non-working dependents who were not previously paying premiums. One NHI card will be issued per member.