

DIALOGUE

Perspective of speech and hearing therapy in the era of new rehabilitation

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(Takeda) We welcome Dr. Junichi Fukaura, the President of the Japan Speech and Hearing Therapist Association, as the guest of the dialogue on the rehabilitation for the new era. Dr. Fukaura, please briefly introduce your biography, current area of specialization, current position, and so on.

PERSONAL HISTORY OF PROF. FUKAURA

(Fukaura) Though I am now serving as the President of the Japan Speech and Hearing Therapist Association, my career building is rather unusual, because I was enrolled in the Department of Mechanical Engineering, Kyushu University, and I was naturally expected to be an engineer after graduation. When I was a student at Kyushu University, I was engaged with children with disabilities in a circle, and I was active there. After graduation, I once worked for a small company, but when I went to the facility for children with intellectual disabilities that I used to visit when I was at university, the director of the facility told me his plan that he would start the language training program for handicapped children from the next year. He was looking for someone who could take care of this language training program. Then, regardless of whether I was the right person or not, I quit the company and got a job at his facility, and the following year I was sent to a training center for hearing language specialists at the National Center for Hearing and Language Disabilities, where I was educated by the well-known teachers and specialists in the field. I found the field of language and speech therapy interesting. After one year education at National Center, I returned to the facility and practiced language and speech therapy to children with intellectual disabilities.

In those days, National Saga Medical College was established as a new medical college in 1981, and

the professor of otolaryngology of Saga Medical College at that time asked me if I would come to his department in April 1982, when the affiliated hospital opened. I accepted his invitation, and I worked as a speech therapist at Saga Medical College for 25 years.

(Takeda) Professor Fukaura, at that time there wasn't a national qualification for a speech therapist, was it?

(Fukaura) That's right. The first national examination for speech therapists was in 1999 (Heisei the 11th), and there was no such national examination until then.

(Takeda) Only because there was a need for speech therapists at otolaryngology department of Saga Medical College, the college hired you as a language specialist. Did you become a faculty member of Saga Medical College without any special qualifications?

(Fukaura) I'm not a medical profession, so the professor asked me to join his Department as an administrative person. The professor of otolaryngology that I mentioned earlier, had come from Kurume University, where a first-year student of the training school I went to have already been employed at Kurume University Hospital. Seeing how he worked, the professor called me to become a speech therapist at the otolaryngology department.

(Takeda) It's amazing that you decided to go to a place where there was no other people with the similar occupation, but also as an administrative position rather than a medical position at the otolaryngology department. It may imply the fact that there was a high need for speech and hearing therapists from that time.

(Fukaura) I think there was a great need. At that time, I was invited by a professor of otolaryngology, and a professor of oral surgery, and I also provided

speech treatment for children with cleft palate in dental and oral surgery. In those days, there were only four speech therapists in Saga Prefecture, including myself. And the two were at a public hospital who treat speech disorders due to adult aphasia and cerebrovascular disease, and the other one was at the Prefectural Koseikan Hospital, and I worked at the otolaryngology department of Saga Medical College.

(Takeda) I could say that a person who graduated from the Faculty of Engineering at Kyushu University and expected to take a role for the Japanese industry in the future have gone to the field of speech-language therapist.

(Fukaura) No, not so much, and it just happened. I think I am lucky to have entered this path which woke me up until now. It's an area where I entered without knowing anything, but I think I was fortunate to be able to talk with people from various positions and contribute to society in no small measure.

(Takeda) It was a splendid transformation of you. I think you and my generation overlapped with the period of economic development, and the time when Japan developed through manufacturing electronics and transistors, and you could be actively involved with engineering fields. Rather, you told me that you were very fulfilled when you chose the path of rehabilitation, especially as a speech-language therapist. Even so, I think there were many difficulties to continue your career to become the president of the Japan Speech Therapist Association, where you are expected to unite and take care of speech therapists nationwide.

HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATION OF SPEECH AND HEARING THERAPIST

(Takeda) Looking at the current situation of speech therapists, what do you think has improved and what do you think there is still some improvement? What kind of efforts will be necessary for speech-language therapist to continue to grow?

(Fukaura) As I said earlier, there were only four speech therapists in Saga Prefecture when I got my position at Saga Medical College in 1982. When the first national examination was held in 1999, about 5,000 people sat for the exam. There was a significant increase in the number of speech therapists during the period between mid-1975 and 1999. The reason was that, as you pointed out earlier, even though we were not qualified profession, many hospitals hired us because speech therapists were

necessary facing an aging society. The number of people who passed the national examination has increased from 5,000 in the first round to 36,255 at the 23rd national exam in March of this year.

(Fukaura) There are more than 100,000 physical therapists and more than 50,000 occupational therapists in Japan, who started the national qualification system 23 years earlier than speech therapists. I think that the number of speech therapists has been increasing considerably as a late-comer. The rehabilitation by speech therapists has been quite enhanced in the medical field especially in hospitals, and rehabilitation service for people with aphasia, difficulty speaking, dysarthria after stroke or dysphagia has improved considerably, but it's still not enough. Even in medical facility, there are many places where there is not enough speech therapists in some areas, and we are always recruiting the people in such places. Another point is that the area of long-term care is important now. In order to support an aging society, it is becoming very important to provide rehabilitation in the field of long-term care, but there are still few speech therapists working there. The future issue is that the profession has been absorbed by the medical staff and it is difficult to get a job in the field of long-term care. I mentioned the number of people sitting for the national examination earlier, but the number of people who take the examination every year is just over 2000, implying the total number of graduates from training schools nationwide is about 2000. Since the number of successful applicants is about 1,700, it is a little difficult to expand to the long-term care area in the situation where the number of successful applicants increases only by that amount every year. If possible, I would like to see more training schools for speech therapists.

HOW TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF SPEECH THERAPISTS

(Takeda) The national qualification system was established in 1999, and the number of people who have the qualification of a speech therapist has increased to more than 36,000, and it is fulfilling in hospitals etc. I learned that the community and nursing care facilities are still insufficient, and that more speech therapists will be needed to cope with the super-aging society in near future. Is the number of speech therapists controlled by the ministry of welfare or local government?

(Fukaura) Right now, it seems there is no rules on it,

and if you want to build a school for speech therapist, you can. More schools for speech therapists are needed, but it depends on the decision of universities or colleges whether they are willing to add schools for training of speech therapists. The number of speech therapists will not increase easily unless we have more training schools.

(Takeda) Osaka Kawasaki Rehabilitation University have three majors under rehabilitation department, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech/hearing therapy with the enrollment capacity of 60, 60, and 40, respectively. I think also we need more schools for training speech therapists. There are few training schools for speech therapists, there are only five in Osaka prefecture, including vocational schools and universities. We have difficulty in recruiting 40 people who wants to be a speech therapist. I do not know the reason why we cannot fulfill the capacity whether we are not making enough efforts or students are not well aware of the importance of speech therapists. Therefore, I would like to ask you how we can overcome the problem of not getting enough students. As the president of the Japan Speech-Language-Hearing Association, you say that we need more speech therapists and more training schools. But we have less students than the enrollment capacity. Could you please tell us how to overcome the situation?

(Fukaura) Yes, I think it's a difficult problem. The Association will continue to make efforts to increase students aiming to be a speech therapist, but I think the biggest problem is that society has low awareness of speech therapists. Though the number of speech therapists has increased, the activities of speech therapists may not be easily touched by the general public and high school students. When people talk about rehabilitation, physiotherapists are the representative job titles, but speech therapists are hard to come by. The profession of speech therapist may have not been popular to the public. I think there are many high school students who want to be involved with psychological or educational aspects, and it would be great if we could appeal to those young people. As activity of speech therapists is concerned with rather invisible functions such as speaking, hearing, cognitive function, learning etc., which should be more important than physical function. Psychology and education are more visible and easier to understand, but those students are also good in speech therapy. I wonder if there is any way to encourage them to understand such characteristics of speech and hearing.

(Takeda) I think the word psychology is easy to understand, isn't it? People who are interested in psychology and language go to easy-to-understand psychology, and those who are interested in education and language can go to education because education is easy to understand in terms of words. I don't know if this is the case, but we should encourage students who are interested in psychology or education to come to speech therapy field.

(Fukaura) I agree, but I would like the students who will investigate in more detail to know that speech therapists help disabled people for the better life. There are students who want to become a speech therapist because they are interested in medical service to help patients. Therefore, the big framework of rehabilitation is also important, but I think it is important to publicize the job of speech therapists based on the occupational characteristics of speech therapists.

(Takeda) You're right. In short, it is necessary to make efforts to make young people understand the message that a speech therapist is so useful to people by appealing to everyone's feelings of wanting to be useful or beneficial to others.

(Fukaura) We listen to the language, understand and learn the language, and the child will learn the language and use it in society. That is why human society is established by words, so words are a basic function of creating human society. Therefore, people with disabilities are terribly lonely, although it is difficult to understand, they often hesitate to go out into society. In order to give such people confidence, we are doing an important job for those people to help recover and encourage to go out into society. The other important aspect for speech therapist is to support eating a life-sustaining diet, ensuring nutrition, and restoring its basic function of eating and swallowing. I think that speech therapists have a very important role in helping to restore the important function of living in society.

(Takeda) I wanted high school students to listen to the words of you. The passionate feelings based on your experience were well conveyed. I feel that the explanation that the job of a speech therapist is to help all human beings live in society attracts a lot of young people. As I said earlier, if there are enough applicants next year to fill the capacity of the Department of Speech and Hearing at our university, I think it is a gift of your words.

(Fukaura) The Japan Speech and Hearing Association has the branches in every prefecture and the prefectural associations are also working hard to raise awareness together with Japan Association. We are

conducting public relations activities to make our profession more visible in early September. I keep saying that it is important to continue this activity every year for the people to recognize it. I think it is important to proceed with this in cooperation with not only prefectural association but also the training school. It would be good to have people do something like work experience in each area. In some prefectures, physiotherapist association, occupational therapist association, and speech therapist association cooperate to provide rehabilitation work experience at the hospital, so such activities are carried out in various places. In this way we should promote public relations activities to raise awareness.

(Takeda) You're right. Recently, when I had a conversation with Professor Fujii, who is the president of the Osaka Prefectural Speech and Hearing Association, I learned that September 1st is designated as Speech and Hearing Day. I also wanted to hold such an enlightenment activity meeting with Professor Fujii at our university in early September, and we had just begun to discuss what we could do with Osaka Association of Speech and Hearing therapist.

SCHOOL FOR SPEECH THERAPIST TRAINING

(Takeda) There are several types of training schools for speech therapists, such as vocational schools and shorter-term special courses, in addition to four-year universities such as Osaka Kawasaki Rehabilitation University. What are the characteristics of each of these training schools?

(Fukaura) The structure of the training school for speech therapists is quite complicated. I think this is also due to the fact that it is a newly created occupation. Physiotherapists and occupational therapists are qualified to take the national examination at a training institution that is three or four years after graduating from high school. For us, speech therapists, as you know, it's a bit complicated. There are three main types: a four-year university, a three-year vocational school, and a two-year vocational school for those who have graduated from university. These are about one-third each. There is also a one-year process in which, although there are only a few, if you have a license for another medical profession, you will be eligible to take the speech therapist exam if you acquire specialized language subjects and practical training. When we have originally created the system, we asked various people to be involved at that time because we thought it would be good to have people

from various backgrounds become speech therapists. If a person who graduated from one university can become a speech therapist after undergoing a two-year specialization process, when graduating from a four-year university, for example pedagogy, psychology, or other various cultural faculties. There were also a few people who had graduated from engineering, electrical, mechanical, or acoustic systems. This is because we have brought our original expertise to the field of speech-language therapist and have been able to do basic things, so it is not possible to have human resources who make a great contribution to the research of speech-language-hearing science or clinical practice in basic science. I think this will be welcomed, as I think it will be possible.

AUDIOLOGY EXPERTISE

(Takeda) The area of speech and hearing originally covers a wide range of areas, so there is plenty of room for people with diverse backgrounds, such as education, psychology, and sound to be a successful speech therapist.

(Fukaura) Yes. For example, high school students may think it has nothing to do with sound, but hearing-impaired people use hearing aids or cochlear implants. These are the products of machines, aren't they? Recently, after graduating from university or training school, the number of speech therapists are working at manufacturers and dealers selling hearing aids and cochlear implant companies. It would be better for speech therapist to have knowledge of such an acoustic system.

(Takeda) Recent hearing aids are much more sophisticated and developed than old hearing aids, which emphasize and enhance only human conversation sounds. I think that fitting such a hearing aid requires a great deal of advanced knowledge and skills. Isn't a speech therapist qualification required for the sale of hearing aids?

(Fukaura) Not necessarily needed. Hearing aids were on market much earlier than the qualification of speech therapist. We can't erode it, but the needs of hearing aid companies are increasing, and more companies are hiring speech therapists. From the perspective of a biological engineering, there is and will be a high need for speech therapists in various industry fields.

(Takeda) The more I hear, I think the brighter the future of speech therapists. The words from you to our university is a good hint to recruit young people to speech therapist by doing something like the actual

work experience and internship through enlightenment activities which appeal to high school students. We will make efforts to let people know the breadth and depth of speech and hearing therapy. We will do our best, and we ask for the support of the Association of Speech Therapists.

CAREER BUILDING FOR COLLEGE GRADUATES AND FEMALE SPEECH THERAPISTS

(Takeda) Osaka Kawasaki Rehabilitation University is promoting the program of re-enrollment for the people who graduated from another university. When we see the background of new students to our University, the number of students who transferred to the speech-language-hearing major from other university is larger than physiotherapy or occupational therapy major. Also, when comparing by gender, there is a tendency that there are more women in speech and hearing than in physiotherapy or occupational therapy. It seems profession of speech therapist fit more to working people or women.

(Fukaura) I think so. When the qualification system was first established, more than 80% were women. Recently, the ratio of men has increased to a little bit below 80%, but there are still more women than men. I don't know why, but as I said earlier, affiliation of female to psychology and education may be related to the large number of women speech therapists. In that sense, women may be suitable for speech therapist. Speech therapists often work for children with speech disorders, in which women are more suitable than men. Physical strength may be sometimes necessary, but it is not a job that uses physical strength insanely, so it is a job that is suitable for women to engage with.

(Takeda) There are many women who want to become nurses, but it is not an easy job. Nurses have night shifts, which is difficult for women, so should be prepared for a difficult job. I'm sorry to say that, but I think speech therapists are basically working on a regular basis, in daily job hours, so in that sense it may be one of the professions suitable for women.

(Fukaura) I agree.

GRADUATE SCHOOL FOR SPEECH THERAPISTS

(Takeda) Osaka Kawasaki Rehabilitation University is prepared to create a master's course graduate school and has been successfully approved from the

Ministry of Education to launch the Graduate School of Rehabilitation. I would like to know what kind of graduate school education is desired in the field of speech therapists. Could you tell us about what you are doing, or what kind of things you are looking forward to the graduate school?

(Fukaura) Yes, I am happy to know that a graduate school will be set up at Osaka Kawasaki Rehabilitation University, which is exactly we are aiming for. In the United States, speech therapists are divided into two occupations, speech therapists and audiologists. It is also the same in Canada, Australia, and nearby South Korea. In the United States, speech therapists are licensed after a one-year internship after graduating from a four-year college and graduating from a master's degree in graduate school. Audiologists are required to complete a PhD course. This is the reality in the world, which is also happening in other specialty professions as well. It is becoming more and more popular for professionals who have received such a high degree of education. On the other hand, in Japan, only undergraduate education is required for a profession, so qualifications are given only by basic education. In such a short education period, each specialized area of speech therapist can no more be covered. Speech therapists are in charge of a wide range of areas of speech and hearing, such as speech delay, hearing loss, cerebrovascular disease (aphasia and dysarthria after stroke) dysarthria associated with cleft palate, dysarthria, speech disorders, speech disorders in the otolaryngology area, higher brain dysfunction. There are also a wide variety of specialized fields, such as communication disorders associated with dementia and dysarthria, and eating and swallowing disorders. I think that each of us must be independent, to carry out solid clinical practice, and to create evidence in the fields of treatment of language and hearing. The master's program is important in terms of science. If possible, I would be grateful if you could set up a doctoral course and create human resources who can carry out advanced research in the field of speech and hearing.

(Takeda) Thank you. Considering the current situation in Europe and the United States, useful services are needed for people with various disabilities, from children to cerebrovascular accidents and the elderly. It is well understood that undergraduate education is not enough. We will educate the students who can provide evidence for their rehabilitation services as the goal of training in the master's program. I would like to continue to receive guidance and advice in various ways from your Association.

MESSAGE TO YOUNG PEOPLE

(Takeda) It's been a while, but time is up. I would like to ask for your message to young people, to a young speech therapist, or to those who want to aim for the speech therapist field in the future. I would like to conclude today's interview by letting you give us a message for the young people.

(Fukaura) Thanks you, Professor Takeda. As I said earlier, the goal and work of a speech therapist is the most important function for human beings, communication and swallowing, that is, the function for eating. We provide speech-language rehabilitation so that those who have problems can return to their original lives or live as independently as possible despite their disabilities. In that sense, what we are doing is not just what we are doing in front of each person, but what we are doing to the patients in front of us, the form of disability, and the families behind it. You may think how deeply it is influencing others. In that sense, we are very responsible, and if we do, we can take pride in our work and have evidence of efficient

speech-language pathology and feeding function therapy for patients and people with disabilities. For that purpose, I would like you to work on such things as self-improvement and lifelong learning on a daily basis. Then, to all the junior high school and high school students who are thinking of becoming a speech therapist, as I said, our work is to make patients happy, to make their families happy. I hope you understand that we are there, and I would like you to join us.

(Takeda) Professor Fukaura, thank you very much. Although it was a short time, you have given us a very useful information about the actual activities of a speech therapist. Finally, thank you for putting together a message for young speech therapists and even those who are about to become speech therapists.

(Interviewer: Masatoshi Takeda; Interview date: July 13 2021; This paper was translated by Masatoshi Takeda.)