

Whole-person Healing

Birthday Offering recipient celebrates 50 years of physical and spiritual care

BY PATRICK COLE

Yodogawa Christian Hospital (YCH), a sprawling 607-bed facility in Osaka, Japan, seems far removed from the modest clinic it was when it opened a half-century ago.

Times and technology have changed dramatically. The scope of YCH's medical offerings has expanded exponentially. But the philosophy espoused in that little clinic by a Presbyterian missionary doctor still guides the facility as it continues playing a key role in Japan's health care system, says Takeshi Ishida, YCH's superintendent.

YCH focuses on "whole-person healing," offering care that meets patients' physical, mental and spiritual needs. "The spiritual aspect has been neglected in this nation," Ishida explained. "Spiritual care has always been an important part of our mission."

In 1955, Dr. Frank Brown opened Yodogawa Christian Clinic in an impoverished neighborhood in Osaka. The needs—and ministry potential—of post-war Japan soon caught the attention of Women of the Church (a predecessor to Presbyterian Women), who donated \$200,000 from the Birthday Offering to build a 76-bed hospital in 1956.

Since the beginning, daily chapel services for hospital staff have been a key part of YCH's spiritual emphasis. "It's absolutely necessary that staff come together for worship every day, so that we can continue the idea of whole-person healing at YCH," said Hidenori Tamura, director of YCH's evangelistic department. The worship service and other Christian programs are broadcast to patients' rooms by closed-circuit television.

Alongside the spiritual emphasis, YCH has been at the forefront of several medical advances in Japan. Among its innovations:

- Japan's first blood transfusion for RH incompatibility, in 1957
- A pioneering hospital-volunteer program, in 1962
- The hiring of Japan's first medical social worker, in 1967

- The country's first program offering special care for terminally ill patients and their families, in 1973
- A hospice unit, one of Japan's first, opened in 1984
- Successful surgery to separate Siamese twins—the second in Japan and the 16th in the world—in 1975
- An elder care unit to serve Japan's burgeoning senior population, in 1998

In a recent ranking of Japanese hospitals by Trendy, a national Japanese magazine, YCH was rated the top facility in the Osaka area and the eighth best in Japan.

YCH's unabashed commitment to Christianity is rare for a hospital in Japan, a nation in which less than one percent of the population is Christian. But YCH continues to fill its beds, which hospital leaders say is a tribute to high-quality patient care. "We have a good reputation, because we provide good medical treatment and are patient-centered," Ishida said.

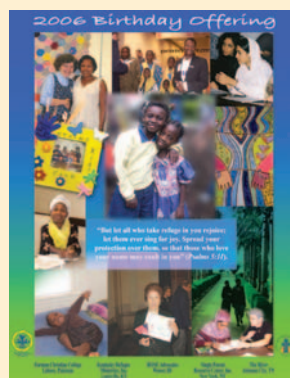
YCH board and staff leaders are Christians, and the makeup of the staff is decidedly more Christian than the general population. About 14 percent of all employees and 19 percent of YCH physicians are Christians.

But non-Christian employees also appreciate the faith-based commitments of YCH, Ishida said.

What Is the Birthday Offering?

The Birthday Offering is one of two special monetary offerings of Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Creative Ministries Offering

Committee (CMOC) of Presbyterian Women meets in the fall to review applications and make selections. Grant recipients are announced each year in the January/February issue of *Horizons*. For an application or more information, contact Cindy Goodman, 888/728-7228, ext. 5387, or cgoodman@ctr.pcusa.org.





The Yodogawa Christian Hospital, Osaka, Japan



Photos courtesy of Patrick Cole

Mary Elva Smith, left, associate director of Women's Ministries, PC(USA), and Kathryn Baker, middle, vice moderator for mission relationships, PW, were honored at a ceremony celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Birthday Offering grant that helped build the Yodogawa Christian Hospital.

“Those who don’t buy this drift away,” he said. “The emphasis on whole-person healing has strengthened the entire staff.”

Although there are now no mission workers on the YCH staff, the hospital acknowledges its mission heritage by inviting Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) mission personnel in Japan to serve on its boards. Tim Boyle and Yukiko Altman are members of the hospital’s board of directors, while Bill Moore and Christian Zebley are on its board of counselors, for which Ann Moore serves as auditor.

YCH contributes surplus revenues to mission causes, including the PC(USA)’s Worldwide Ministry Division (WMD), which has received \$300,000 from YCH in the past four years.

YCH has shared its expertise with hospitals that serve people who are poor in Bangladesh, Nepal and China. It also extends its international reach through close relationships with hospitals in Korea and Taiwan that are committed to whole-person healing.

YCH held a 50th anniversary celebration on May 28, 2005. More than 40 retired Presbyterian missionaries and children of retired missionaries returned to Japan for the event. They were joined by current mission

personnel in Japan and representatives from the PC(USA) staff, Presbyterian Women and the General Assembly Council.

Lardner Moore, a retired PC(USA) missionary assigned to YCH in 1956, said the early missionaries never dreamed that the hospital would grow as it has. “In the old days, money was so tight,” said Moore, who retired from YCH’s evangelistic department in 2000. He said he is pleased with the ongoing Christian emphasis at YCH and “amazed they are so strong in that area.” He pointed out that many Japanese hospitals founded by other denominations have lost their Christian focus.

In its early days, Yodogawa served an impoverished population. Now that a national health-insurance program covers nearly everyone in Japan, charity care is not the concern it once was. Still, hospitals make choices about what services to offer, and are tempted to provide only those most generously reimbursed by insurance. Yodogawa keeps its eye on financial stability, Ishida said, but always maintains its emphasis on patients’ needs.

“We will not cut an area because it is not profitable,” he said. “We don’t want to focus on profits, but the needs of patients overall. Our

experience is that God always provides the resources to do that.”

YCH’s greatest period of expansion came under the leadership of Dr. Seiya Shirakata, who succeeded Brown as superintendent in 1978 and served until 1996. In those years, YCH grew from 195 beds to the current 607.

Shirakata said he remembers a conversation with Brown that helped him understand the importance of the hospital’s Christian mission. Shirakata, who had just become superintendent, sought Brown’s counsel on some tough economic issues. “He emphasized that the real purpose of the hospital is for the glory of God,” Shirakata recalled. “He said if we don’t serve that purpose, there is no need for the hospital.” While the hospital is grateful for Brown’s legacy of whole-person healing, Ishida said the roots of the concept extend beyond Brown. “This understanding of whole-person healing is not something Dr. Brown created,” he said. “It is Christianity.”

Patrick Cole is the associate for communications, Worldwide Ministries Division, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

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