

International Conference for the Bone and Joint Decade 2000–2010 and the 50th Anniversary of the Initiation of the Rheumatism Control Program in Japan

It is truly significant that the Japan Rheumatism Foundation has convened this “International Conference for the Bone and Joint Decade 2000–2010” in this year that marks the auspicious occasion of the 50th anniversary of the initiation by a government agency of a research program on rheumatism in Japan. I am very happy to be able to meet rheumatism experts who have come to Japan from various foreign countries, Japanese rheumatism experts and patients, as well as the representatives of support groups from home and abroad, who have all come to attend this conference.

It was about 2 years ago that the World Health Organization declared 2000–2010 the “Bone and Joint Decade” in order to further advance the global movement to fight rheumatism. I imagine that the countless patients who suffer from this disease in different parts of the world have taken heart from this initiative, and have great expectations of its results. Rheumatism has been left behind in medical science as one of the incurable diseases, and even its causes are still largely unknown. I have heard that, as the background for the recent attention to this disease, there is the recognition that the number of its patients has continued to increase world-wide, and this has caused in many countries increases in medical expenses and a labor shortage. However, before moving to solve these practical problems, what we have to recognize now, first and foremost, are the characteristics of rheumatism and the suffering of those patients who are in the grip of the disease. It is my sincere hope that, through the implementation of this declaration, patients will be given more reliable points of contact with medicine, and also be given a little better peace of mind while they live with this disease, through greater understanding of their situation in society.

Although I lack sufficient medical knowledge about rheumatism, I was unexpectedly given an opportunity to think more deeply about this disease 37 years ago. Five years before that, a number of rheumatism patients in Japan had come together to create the “Japan Rheumatism Friendship Association” and published a magazine “Nagare,” or “Current,” which was named after characteristics of the disease itself. On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Association, I was presented with a copy of “Nagare” and met with representatives of the patients. Thus, I came to have some knowledge of the disease about which previously I had only a very vague idea, and caught a glimpse of how many people who live with this disease made brave efforts to improve their quality of life by various

expedients. Since its foundation, the Association has implemented studies into the actual state of the disease and published on the occasion of its thirtieth anniversary, a “White Paper on Rheumatism” of its own. Subsequent white papers have been published in significant anniversary years, which have shed light on the situation of sufferers of the disease. Today, as we are faced with the aging of society, I feel that we have a lot to learn from the history of the Association, where the patients themselves have been seriously seeking the best medical treatment and have been sharing knowledge and experience with one another.

There are researchers and doctors who have focused on this disease, the research on which tended to be neglected as mankind has lived with it for so long. They have lent their ears to appeals from the patients and have made unstinting efforts to conduct various types of research and to render medical care to alleviate the pains experienced by the patients. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to these researchers and doctors, together with all the patients of this disease. I sincerely hope that more doctors specialized in the disease will emerge in future under your guidance so that more and more people in ever wider regions of the world will be given accurate diagnosis at an early stage of the illness and be led to proper medical care. It is also my heartfelt hope that, in a not too distant future, the day will come when the causes of rheumatism will be identified and fundamental ways to cure this disease will be established.

I see that this conference is being attended, together with doctors and researchers, by the representatives of support groups. I am very happy to note that through your support, patients are able to lead independent lives within the scope of their capabilities and are achieving maximum integration into society.

It is truly gratifying to see so many people who are involved with rheumatism gathered here today, including the patients themselves, to exchange and share knowledge and experience about this disease, and I wish the conference every success. I would like to express my sincere hope that the result of this conference will be fully utilized in developing measures to cope with rheumatism around the world and will thus be brought back to all those who suffer from the disease.

Her Majesty the Empress of Japan

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