Inaugural Address as President of the World Medical Association

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Right Honorable Donald Dewar, Dr. Milton, Professor Blahos, Dr. Human, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen and fellow colleagues, it is a tremendous honor to be present at such a distinguished assembly as this and deliver my first presidential address as the new President of the World Medical Association. This is perhaps the brightest moment of my life. It is particularly fortunate at the junction of two centuries to be able to serve as President of the World Medical Association and work to improve human health and welfare. At the same time, I am also painfully aware of the great weight of responsibility that this position brings.

This honorable assembly has just witnessed my taking the highly dignified oath that I shall endeavor to assist all people to attain the highest possible level of health, and carry out the duties of the office of the President of the World Medical Association. I will remember this vow to the end of my days, a commitment to continue working with my esteemed colleagues from around the world.

I am very proud of the numerous declarations, statements, and resolutions that have been achieved by pooling the wisdom of the National Medical Associations. One example is the Declaration of Helsinki. In every country, this Declaration is reflected in laws and regulations, and I applaud its contribution to ensuring that physicians worldwide do everything in their power for their patients, within the principles of medical ethics.

One of the reasons I am particularly interested in the Helsinki Declaration is the issue of medical ethics and the mapping of the human genome, a technique that has developed quickly in recent years.

Humanity has made great strides toward unlocking the secrets of life itself at the end of the twentieth century. New treatments are being discovered for conditions that have until now been virtually untreatable, including many genetic diseases and cancer or even...
diabetes, bringing hope to many people who have fallen into a spiral of despair. At the turn of the century, all humankind is waiting expectantly for the contributions to humanity that the mapping of the human genome may bring.

But at the same time we should remember some of the other important lessons that humanity learned in the twentieth century. Humans also succeeded in unlocking the secrets of the atom, thinking of the noble goal of improving human welfare, but instead ended up building a weapon of mass destruction.

This fatal weakness of human beings must not be realized again in the manipulation of the human genome. Genome mapping must be done for the sake of humanity, and as stated in the Hippocratic Oath, must “first do no harm.” As members of the World Medical Association, we must use our collective wisdom to protect humanity in this way.

While we should be happy with the great fortune of being able to enjoy the benefits of unlimited progress in science and technology, I am also resolved that we should make a strong commitment to channeling the unlimited hopes that advanced research contains.

As President of the World Medical Association who bridges the old and new centuries, I will continue the basic commitment to medical ethics that the National Medical Associations have agreed to, beginning with the Helsinki Declaration, and base my presidency on the principle of “channeling the abundant benefits of advanced medical technology.” This kind of principle will surely contribute greatly to progress in medical research. Although the benefits of advanced medical research are not limited to the results of human genome mapping, it is vital that medical researches contribute not only to finding cures, but also to ensuring patient safety.

In the increasingly productive field of clinical research, it is not easy, but we must also put our efforts into adequate consideration of the balance between high-quality results and patient safety. I believe that we must do so in order to give patients an increased sense of security, and reinforce their faith in the value of medical treatment itself. The theme of patient safety should also be an issue of special concern for the World Medical Association.

I also have great respect for the efforts of the World Medical Association to support physicians who are under pressure for various reasons. These efforts are vital from a moral standpoint as well. Whatever the conditions, the World Medical Association and its members stand by physicians in a weak position and lend support that at least eases their suffering. Such support also strengthens the World Medical Association as an organization, and thus increases the value of the World Medical Association in its other activities as well. In the future, it is important to further our support of physicians in need by making their cases known to the international community.

After the Ottawa General Assembly, Immediate Past President Dr. Blahos brought me a proposal for the creation of World Medical Association regional offices. This measure will produce many benefits including the ability to develop more concrete and more detailed
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statements.

Work has already begun to establish the World Medical Association Asian Regional Office. In accordance with the report on the creation of regional offices, as modified by Chairperson of Council of the World Medical Association Dr. Milton and Secretary General Dr. Human, a proposal was made to the September 2000 Confederation of Medical Associations in Asia and Oceania Midterm Council Meeting to establish the Asian Regional Office in Tokyo. Establishing a network of regional medical offices, and developing their functions, will contribute greatly to the ability of the World Medical Association to further promote a healthy life for all people.

The World Medical Association also has a special interest in fostering the next generation of physicians. At the General Assembly, we invite representatives of medical students, and we should continue to do other such activities to deepen understanding of the World Medical Association and its goals. Furthermore, we should decide quickly on ways to reach out to them, and develop promotional materials and seminar programs to ensure that the next generation understands that at the heart of medical science and the practice of medicine is a love for humanity.

The Japan Medical Association celebrates the graduation of students from medical departments. As they embark on their journey into the world of medicine, the JMA presents them with a short essay by the renowned Japanese medical researcher Dr. Koan Ogata in which he reflects on “Die Verhaeltnisse Des Arztes” by German pediatrician Dr. Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland and wrote that the basic framework for all actions by physicians is a love for humanity.

Each national medical association probably has its own way of reaching out to the next generation, and if each NMA does this, I believe it will produce good results.

And even though it is already widely accepted that continuing education is essential for physicians, the World Medical Association can contribute by promoting widely the results of its deliberations and the common issues it has discussed. Wide dissemination of the work of the World Medical Association will help by both providing evidence of its success and providing a basis for development of further declarations and reports.

Finally, I would like to read for this assembly one of my favorite poems: “Strong in the Rain” by Kenji Miyazawa.

Kenji Miyazawa was born in the northeastern part of Japan. He lived his life in an extremely poor rural village, wrote fairy tales, and as a poet proclaimed his love for all of humanity. This poem is well-known in Japan.
STRONG IN THE RAIN

Strong in the rain
Strong in the wind
Strong against the summer heat and winter snow
He is healthy and robust
Unselfish
He never loses his temper
Nor the quiet smile on his lips
He eats four small bowls\(^1\) of unrefined rice\(^2\)
Miso\(^3\) and a small portion of vegetables each day
He does not consider his own interest
In whatever occurs...his understanding
 Comes from observation and experience
And he never loses sight of things
He lives in a little thatched-roof hut
In a field in the shadows of a pine tree grove
If there is a sick child in the east
He goes there to nurse the child
If there's a tired mother in the west
He goes to her and carries her sheaves
If someone is near death in the south
He goes and says, “Don’t be afraid”
If there’s strife and lawsuits in the north
He demands that the people put an end to their pettiness
He weeps at the time of drought
He plods about at a loss during the cold summer
Everyone calls him “Blockhead”
No one sings his praises
Or takes him to heart
He is the sort of person
I want to be

\(^1\) The Japanese measurement translated here is “go”, about 0.04 liters of rice.
\(^2\) Unrefined, or unpolished rice, was considered to be fit only for the poorest people in Japan.
\(^3\) Miso is a common soup base in Japan made from fermented soybean paste and salt.