

From “Perinatal Visit” to “Healthy Start Oita” —Efforts to develop a mother-child health and child-rearing support program—

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The Oita-method perinatal visit (child-rearing and health guidance) project, which began as a single-year, coordinated obstetrician-pediatrician model project of the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare and the Japan Medical Association (JMA) in 2001 reached its 8th year in 2008. The success of this project was reported at the maternal and child health seminar of JMA in 2006, and published in *Nippon Ishikai Zasshi* (Journal of the Japan Medical Association) (136;4(supp.):89–95).

The highlights of this project were that, unlike all other maternal and child health projects carried out by municipalities, the project promotion committee was organized jointly by the Oita medical association (OiMA), the Oita association of obstetricians and gynecologists, the Oita association of pediatricians, and local governments that included the health promotion division of the prefecture and three cities where the project was implemented. This project, intended for all primiparous women and multiparous women in this prefecture who required support, is based on funds provided by the OiMA, prefectural association of obstetricians and gynecologists, and prefectural association of pediatricians, in addition to a subsidy given to the OiMA from Oita Prefecture to cover expenses for people outside the municipalities where the project was in effect.

Under the auspices of the project promotion committee, the following were formed: specialty committees consisting of representatives from the health promotion division of the prefectural government, public health nurses from the three cities, the OiMA, obstetricians, and pediatricians.



Obstetricians’ referral forms and pediatricians’ guidance sheets are reviewed once every month by this committee. When intervention is determined to be necessary, supportive measures including ongoing home visits by a public health nurse in the region in question would be taken. The specialty committee also asks for the physician in charge of the case to participate. Recently, psychiatrists and special staff members of child consultation centers have also been asked to participate. The committee makes efforts to solve the various problems that occur in mothers and children, including postpartum depression. Since all the individuals and organizations concerned, including local governments, have gathered for monthly discussions, mutual communication has deepened, and coordination has been enhanced, achieving prompt response and support and greater effectiveness of the project. Furthermore, this project has undergone yearly innovation and improvement as a result of annual opinion exchange sessions composed of the project promotion committee, obstetricians and pediatricians participating in

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this project, and the project staff.

However, the biggest current problem facing the project is that no additional municipalities other than the initial three cities have participated, although there are 18 municipalities in Oita Prefecture.

In 1997, the responsibilities of maternal and child health projects were unified under the various municipalities, although differences in the efforts to sustain such projects have since occurred among the various regions. On the basis of the Oita-method perinatal visit project and its implementation guidelines, the concept of formulating child-rearing support networks including home visits to babies early after birth, as proposed in the Japanese government's new policy of countermeasures to the declining birth-rate, was developed into "Hello Baby Project," which is effectively carried out. In Oita Prefecture, as in other prefectures, various projects aimed at maternal and child health are implemented in different ways dependent upon individual municipalities. It seems that there are some problems about the information of the services and their use.

Families that have economic concerns or a complicated environment that may trigger abuse have been increasing, resulting in an increase in cases where continuing support exceeds the capacity of the municipality alone. In addition, some families do not respond well to interference from administrative authorities and may reject their services. Although there is general recognition that further enhancement of the coordination and network formation of the perinatal visit project is important, large regional differences and insufficient cooperation with the welfare and educational sectors have emerged as issues that will need improvement.

Although each local government or agency is currently making a serious effort to support each project, their activities are apparently not effectively coordinated.

In this regard, Oita Prefecture reviewed the various maternal and child health projects currently in effect by prefectural and municipal governments or medical institutions, and reorganized the services available to children and their families, from the gestational stage to school attendance. The efforts were launched in order to implement the "Healthy Start Oita" project, a part of which was entrusted to the OiMA.

The goals of this project are as follows: to prepare guidelines for collecting and providing information applicable to municipalities, medical institutions, and other bodies by systematically organizing medical care services and maternal and child health services that would be available for mothers and children at each stage of life, from the gestational to the neonatal and infantile stages; and to facilitate the reduction of anxiety over child-rearing, improvement of environments that might trigger abuse, and the healthy growth of children by formulating a "regional mother-child health and child-rearing support system" through the coordination and collaboration of the medical, health, welfare, and education sectors. To promote this "Healthy Start Oita" project, a project promotion committee was set up.

The project promotion committee consists of representatives of the OiMA, prefectural association of pediatricians, prefectural association of obstetricians and gynecologists, prefectural association of psychiatrists, public health nurses (prefecture and municipalities), nursery center staff, kindergarten teachers, and children's consultation office. This committee is in charge of developing the entire prefectural version of guidelines for collecting and providing information and developing a draft of mother-child health and child-rearing support leaflets targeted for the region. In addition, Healthy Start Oita regional specialty committees consisting of pediatricians, obstetricians/gynecologists, psychiatrists, public health nurses, and welfare/education-related professionals are formed for each secondary medical care area. These specialty committees are responsible for the organization of various services for the medical, health, welfare, and education of mothers and children in the respective areas, development of guidelines for collecting and providing information in related institutions, and preparation of health and child-rearing support leaflets targeted for the region. Through these activities, this committee should establish a collaborative system for mother-child health and child-rearing support and promote the coordination of the authorities concerned and validation of the system through continuing review of particular cases.

The goal of "Healthy Start Oita" is that all residents of the prefecture lead a healthy and happy life. This project is aimed at supporting all

residents of the prefecture, through creating a closer network from the cooperation of all supporters of the family in order to make adequate and appropriate information available for residents of the prefecture.

We intend to improve the existing project or develop a new project to offer standard services that are unequivocal and timely for both the provider and the recipient and available to everyone in the prefecture, and to provide additional ser-

vices that are characteristic of the region. It is important to prepare as many options of support as possible and to adequately provide relevant information according to the life stage of the mother and the child. We are determined to provide continuous support based on information shared among all organizations related to medical, health, welfare, and education in the region, school, and workplace.