The Japan Medical Association Has Signed the iJMAT Agreements in Taiwan—Promoting International Cooperation in Medical Aid Activities in Times of Disaster*1

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Japan Medical Association

Dr. Yoshitake Yokokura, President of the Japan Medical Association (JMA) and Dr. Masami Ishii, at that time Executive Board Member of the JMA visited Taiwan on July 30, 2015, to attend the signing ceremony at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and finalized agreements concerning mutual consent on dispatching physicians and assistance systems for medical relief in disaster situations with both the Taiwan Medical Association (TMA)*2 and the Taiwan Root Medical Peace Corps (TRMPC,*3 a Taiwanese non-governmental organization providing international medical assistance), respectively.

In the opening remarks, Dr. Yokokura expressed his gratitude for the numerous donations from Taiwan for the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, and explained that the JMA was asking its members across Japan for donations for the many burn victims of the accidental dust explosion at a water park in New Taipei City, Taiwan, on June 27, 2015.

At the ceremony, which had numerous attendees including representatives from the Ministry of Health and Welfare, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and East Asia Relations Commission (a liaison agency for Taiwan-Japan affairs in Taiwan) as well as members of the Legislative Yuan, Dr. Yokokura, Dr. Ching-Chuan Su, President of the TMA, and Dr. Chi-Chun Liu, President of the TRMPC each signed the relevant agreements. The ceremony was covered by several major media outlets from both Japan and Taiwan, including the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK).

The agreements aim to promote international cooperation regarding medical aid activities in times of disaster at the civilian level based on the concept of iJMAT.*4 It will guarantee Japanese and Taiwanese physicians’ license in

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*1 This is an English-translated version of an article printed in the JMA News No. 1296 (September 5, 2015 Issue).
*4 iJMAT: international Japan Medical Association Team.
both nations and enable these physicians to law-
fully participate in medical activities with physi-
cians from disaster-stricken countries and under
the supervision of leading local physicians, so
they can strive to save disaster victims.

In Japan, foreign physician must pass the
National Medical Practitioners Qualifying Exam-
ination and become licensed to practice medi-
cine in accordance with Articles 2 and 7 of the
Medical Practitioner’s Act. In the aftermath of
the Great East Japan Earthquake, the Ministry
of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan indi-
cated that providing a minimal level of medical
practice for disaster victims in times of unantici-
pated emergency situations can be regarded as
an act of legitimate professional duty under the
penal code and therefore the illegality involved
in such act should be considered annulled; how-
ever, only 4 nations—Israel, Jordan, Thailand,
and the Philippines—were approved even though
over 30 nations, including Taiwan, offered help.

After the signing ceremony, Dr. Ishii empha-
sized the significance of signing the agreements
to the press, stating “The conclusion of the
agreements today will enable medical assistance
between our 2 nations in events of disaster.” He
also shared his view that “Disaster relief will
change to the ‘demand-based type,’ in which
additional assistance will be considered upon
receiving requests from local parties involved,
from the previous ‘push-type’ that can put a bur-
den on the receiving nation.”

As Dr. Yokokura mentioned at the ceremony,
the JMA offered medical assistance to the burn
victims of the dust explosion, prior to the conclu-
sion of the agreements. On July 2, Dr. Shigeru
Suganami, President of the AMDA (The Assos-
ciation of Medical Doctors of Asia, a certified
non-profit organization) and Dr. Yoshito Ujiie,
Chair of the Japanese Society of Intensive Care
Medicine (JSICM) visited Taiwan as an advance
delegation party, and reported that “There are
many patients in highly severe conditions” and
that “They require the expert assistance from
Japan in order to utilize the artificial skins and
medical supplies donated from Japan.” After
receiving requests for assistance from the TMA
and the TRMPC, the JMA dispatched 6 burn
experts recommended by the 3 relevant medical
societies (JSICM, the Japan Association for
Acute Medicine, and the Japanese Society for
Burn Injuries) as the “Joint Burn Care Assis-
tance Team of Physicians by JMA and Three
Medical Societies,” and provided medical sup-
port in Taiwan from July 12 to 15, 2015.