

FOREWORD

Lessons Learning from Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima Nuclear Disaster

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I am honored to have been invited to write a foreword to this pioneering and important volume by Japanese scientists and health care practitioners on the impact of the March 11, 2011 natural disaster in Japan known as the Great East Japan Earthquake. Violence from human and natural disasters is on the rise globally. Natural disasters are dramatically increasing and their impact on human life is vast; there are over 68 million displaced refugees worldwide and hundreds of millions of people displaced by climate change. While a large percentage of people have been impacted by natural disasters and the changing environment, human violence towards plants, animals, and the Earth itself is at an all-time high. Yet these researches in their science and through their humanity bring hope not only to survivors of the recent earthquake in Japan but to survivors all over the world.

When Professor Yasushi Kikuchi and I led the Waseda-Harvard mental health team in Kobe, Japan, amidst the broken city that was still on fire, we found courageous Japanese relief workers and citizen survivors working in a setting where disaster relief, mental health protocols, policies and intervention were in their infancy. As revealed in this volume, Japanese society and political leadership have been moving away from the stigma and ostracism associated with the emotional suffering secondary to traumatic life experiences. But, as is revealed, progress in Japan still needs to be made to have a comprehensive, holistic approach that restores the health and well-being to traumatized persons—maybe even policies that can foster post-traumatic growth.

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In Kobe, I learned first-hand of the tremendous dignity and resiliency of the Japanese people and their culture. One of the most precious moments in my life occurred when I was in a shelter in a school interviewing earthquake survivors. Thousands were living together cramped into a small space. Each family's "home" was a small tatami mat. An elderly Japanese woman who had lost everything invited me to sit next to her and offered me some tea. We shared delightful tea and company for hours together as she told me about the disaster. This moving experience taught me a basic truth that I came to live by in medicine and life—that two people from radically different cultures can share together in an empathic and affectionate experience.

The researchers in this volume are emblematic of the great dignity, resourcefulness, and resiliency of the Japanese earthquake survivors. Disaster relief is primarily about restoring survivors to wellness, a sentiment which is echoed in this volume. I commend and offer gratitude to Professor Takuya Tsujiuchi and his colleagues for offering us this excellent volume.