

Nursing and nursing staff at the *Shima*

KODAMA Shimpei

I was assigned to the Department of Nursing at Kagoshima University in the spring of 2003. After mid-April, when I finally adapted to my new life in Kagoshima, a senior professor said to me, “Will you go on a work trip for me?” The work trip destination was Yoroshima. I will never forget the impression of Yoroshima when I first visited there. It was a small island where all the residents, about 100 or so at the time, lived in a single community. There was a remote area clinic there, but there was only one resident nurse. It was a massive shock to me, who had only seen the Kanto region’s urban areas when speaking about local communities.

I still remember the story that the professor told me upon my return that the term *Shima* in Amami does not refer to the island, but rather the local communities such as the communities where the individuals live. Since then, I have visited the islands of Amami multiple times each year. The professor has already retired, but I have continued to engage in nursing education and research at Kagoshima University.

This question is somewhat out of the blue, but do you all know the term “community-based integrated care system”? It is a system that comprehensively ensures the provision of health care, nursing care, prevention, housing, and livelihood support. By this, the elderly could live the rest of their lives in their own ways in environments familiar to them. It was promoted throughout Japan by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare following the 2011 revision to the Long-term Care Insurance Act. It is also an essential keyword in community health nursing—my field of specialization. The community-based integrated care system emphasizes each region’s making good use of their respective strengths with their limited resources and creating a system that voluntarily and independently utilizes the region’s characteristics.

An additional characteristic of this system is that a small community such as a junior high school district, is considered a regional unit; and that it is conscious of the balance of self-help, mutual aid, and public aid, with a particular emphasis on the role of mutual aid that involves people in the community helping each other. You may have heard of community general support centers set up in municipalities to provide support for this system as a region. The construction of a community-based integrated care system involves considerable participation by nursing professions such as public health nurses, midwives, and nurses, so the importance of community health nursing in the nursing fields has increased in recent years, and there is a strong demand for enhanced education.

When I first heard about this community-based integrated care system, I felt like it was something I had heard about from before. Aren’t these the activities of the island nursing professions that I have always seen until now? What has always left an impression on me when visiting Amami was the appearance of the nurses and local people working there. Each person had their own approach, but the residents were supported with limited resources while utilizing the connections of the people of the *Shima* as strengths so that they could live in their

own ways. In other words, the nurses of Amami naturally built a community-based integrated care system in their respective regions. In fact, the activities of Yamato village and Tatsugo town were taken up by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare as a pioneering example of a comprehensive community care system, and Yamato village was selected as one of the 10 municipalities in the construction model example.

A comprehensive understanding of the patient is a very familiar concept to begin with in the world of nursing. The idea of caring for a patient instead of diagnosing an illness is important in medical care as a whole. However, taking an overall view of the individual, including their relationship with the surrounding environment (family and community), and helping them to live in their own way, has been a particular point of emphasis in the nursing profession. It is easier to say than to implement in practice, but for some reason, I feel that there are many people on the small islands who have naturally learned this.

This feeling may be largely due to the fact that much of the nursing activities in the areas where I was deeply involved, were based in the Amami Islands. However, I feel that one reason is the small size of the islands and their scarcity of resources, as seen in Yoroshima. It is a world that is small but in some sense complete. Within this world as well, there are the nurses who must deal with an overwhelming lack of resources. Each of these situations, by themselves, are a disadvantageous environment, but perhaps the reasonably-sized community of the *Shima*, which fits within a single person's consciousness, can cultivate the ability of nurses to comprehensively grasp the subject at hand.

My interpretation notwithstanding, there are indeed many nurses in Amami who are doing great work. However, it is unfortunate that there are many of these who take this for granted and do not realize the value of their efforts. I think that widely disseminating information about nursing in the *Shima* can contribute not only to the regions in which they are active but also to Amami as a whole, and even to nursing in Japan.

In November 2017, Professor HATANO Hiromichi, who had originally asked me to travel to Yoroshima, hosted an academic meeting of the Japan Society of Rural and Remote Area Nursing in Uken village. The theme was "Talking about *Shima*." Although it is common that academic meetings are generally held in places where transportation is as convenient as possible, we intentionally selected the small village as the venue, not only we had connections with the villagers, but also because we hoped to have attendees actually feel the *Shima* of Amami. As many participants from inside and outside the prefecture gathered, many activities by people active in Amami were also announced. It was an honor for me to be involved as a member of the planning committee as well. We would like to continue contributing to such opportunities and give back to the people of Amami who took care of us.



Opening remarks from the President of an academic meeting of the Japan Society of Rural and Remote Area Nursing held in Uken village