

Securing Physicians on Remote Islands and in Remote Areas (Medical Support Centre Project for Remote Islands and Remote Areas)

Nagasaki Prefecture



Background

Nagasaki Prefecture is one of the few prefectures in Japan with remote islands. Currently, around 110,000 of its residents live on 51 variously-sized islands.

This circumstance makes providing medical care on these islands a crucial aspect of the region's medical policies. In 1968, the prefecture and its cities and towns united to form the Nagasaki Prefecture Remote Islands Medical Association, a partial-affairs-association. The prefecture has been actively committed to remote island medical care since 2009, operating eight hospitals and three clinics, including Goto Chuo Hospital, under the Nagasaki Prefectural Hospital Corporation.

The provision of medical care on the islands is carried out through close collaboration with local municipalities. Residents have access to a comprehensive range of services, including community health, home medical care, primary and secondary medical care, thanks to the presence of prefectural health centres on each remote island. For more advanced tertiary care, the National Hospital Organization Nagasaki Medical Centre and Nagasaki University Hospital in the central part of the prefecture are available.

Project Aims

The concentration of physicians in big cities and their uneven regional distribution have made it challenging to secure medical professionals in remote islands and isolated areas. Municipalities' independent efforts to attract physicians are also reaching their limits. In response, Nagasaki Prefecture offers comprehensive support in securing medical professionals for municipal clinics located on remote islands.

Project Outline

In April 2004, the Prefecture created the Nagasaki Prefecture Medical Support Centre for Remote Islands and Remote Areas. The Centre ensures access to medical care in remote islands and areas by securing medical professionals and promoting innovative community medicine.

To enhance its effectiveness, part of the Centre's operations were outsourced to Nagasaki Medical Centre in October 2011 and later transferred to Nagasaki University Hospital in April 2016.

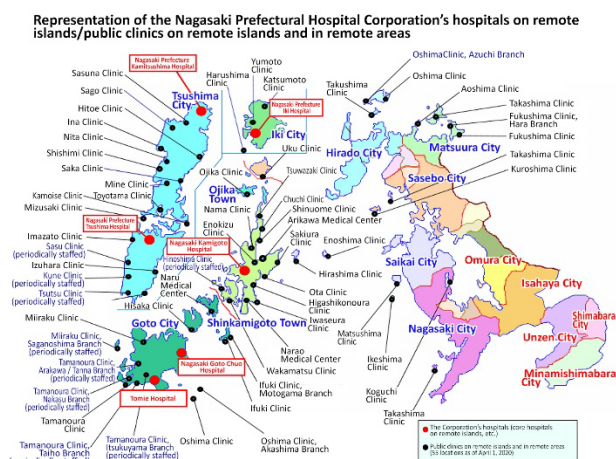
As a Remote Area Medical Support Organization, the Centre carries out its duties in accordance with the national government's plan for remote area health and medical care. It supports remote island and remote area clinics by dispatching full-time physicians and substitute physicians to the municipal clinics in these areas.

The Centre also provides support for medical care in remote islands and remote areas in cooperation with the Regional Medical Resources Support Centre in Nagasaki, established in FY2012.

- About the Support Centre

1. Shimasuketto Group (April 2006 onwards)

The Centre helps ensure access to medical care in these



areas by providing support services such as substitute or on-call physicians when regular full-time physicians attend conferences, etc. It also facilitates the arrangement of substitute physicians from those registered with the Centre's Shimasuketto Group in the event of a full-time physician's retirement or short-term absence. By offering these services, the Centre supports the provision of medical care in these remote communities.

(1) Registration And Dispatch Procedures

- a. Physicians or medical institutions willing to support remote islands and remote area clinics in the prefecture by providing substitute or supplementary care, short-term full-time medical care, etc., can register with the Shimasuketto Group.
- b. If a clinic requires the services of a physician, they may request a dispatch from the Shimasuketto Group through the Centre.
- c. The Centre will match the clinic with suitable physicians from the Shimasuketto Group, considering factors such as their place of residence.
- d. The clinic and the physician will negotiate regarding details such as duration and cost.
- e. The municipality and the registered physician finalize the agreement by signing a contract, with medical services then commencing.

(2) Status of Registration

So far, four medical institutions and 39 physicians from within and outside the prefecture have registered. In FY2021, physicians were dispatched to four clinics for a total of 77 days of treatment.



The Shimasuketto Group uses RIMCAS (Remote Island Medical Co-operation Air Service) to provide medical support

2. Dispatch of Substitute Physicians

The prefecture ensures that medical care is provided in remote islands and remote areas by dispatching full-time physicians from the Nagasaki Regional Medical Human Resource Support Centre at the request of municipalities when their regular physicians are unavailable.

When a local hospital in the area where a municipal clinic is located cannot provide a replacement physician and the clinic's full-time physician is unavailable due to reasons such as academic conferences, training, leave, bereavement, illness, or hospitalization, municipalities can request a full-time physician from the Nagasaki Regional Medical Human Resource Support Centre to ensure medical care is available. In FY2021, physicians were dispatched to six clinics for a total of 121 days of treatment.

3. Recruitment, Placement, and Referring Full-Time Physicians

The Centre also assists with recruiting and referring physicians by providing information about job opportunities through medical journals, websites, and recruitment events and connecting interested physicians with remote area clinics.

The Centre acts as an intermediary for recruiting physicians by directly reaching out to municipalities, clinics, and hospitals of the Nagasaki Prefectural Hospital Corporation (formerly the Nagasaki Prefecture Remote Islands Medical Association) for those looking for job opportunities.

So far, 69 full-time physicians have been employed in municipal clinics, hospitals within the Nagasaki Prefectural Hospital Corporation, and municipal hospitals.

4. Medical Support

The Centre also offers guidance and support to clinic physicians through various means, including information technology.

5. Jurisdiction over Conference on Medical Support Planning in Remote Areas

The Centre also implements a plan to support medical care

in remote areas and improve facilities and equipment at base hospitals and clinics, to ensure that medical care is provided effectively and efficiently in these areas.

6. Career Development System Grants

The Centre provides subsidies to cover the cost of training for general practitioners to cities, towns, and other entities operating clinics in remote areas through its training program for general practitioners. This gives newly-employed physicians the chance to learn general medicine.

Features and Innovations

The full-time physician dispatch system by the Shimasuketto Group and the Centre has successfully enabled the dispatch of substitute physicians, overcoming the challenges that individual municipalities would face.

This dispatch system has assured physicians considering working at clinics in remote areas, as they know they will have backup support in emergencies. It is one of the factors that has encouraged them to take up positions in Nagasaki Prefecture.

The Centre's centralized information on hospital and clinic job openings in the prefecture allows for efficient matching of physicians with institutions that meet their desired working conditions. The Centre's physicians offer guidance and support for career development and medical issues that administrative staff at municipalities may be unable to handle. This support makes it easier for physicians to decide to work in Nagasaki Prefecture.

Issues, Problems and Responses

Despite some successes in securing physicians for remote clinics and dispatching substitute physicians, the Medical Support Centre for Remote Islands and Remote Areas has yet to address the disparities between mainland and remote island healthcare.

To resolve this issue, the Centre will persist in actively promoting physician recruitment through various channels, including online.

Future Developments

Nagasaki Prefecture will persist in offering support to ensure that remote island clinics have access to physicians, as individual efforts by municipalities to secure physicians have reached their limits.

Reference URLs

<http://ncmsc.jp/>

Contact

Affiliation: Medical Personnel Office

Phone number: +81-095-895-2421

E-mai: s04045@pref.nagasaki.lg.jp