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[FUKUSHIMA RADIATION SYMPOSIUM 2013]

ON A “FUKUSHIMA RADIATION SYMPOSIUM 2013” SERIES

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On the 18th of July, 2011, four months after the catastrophic accident of Tokyo Electric Power's Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, which was caused by a giant tsunami triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake, The Fukushima Society of Medical Science held a symposium called, “Fukushima Symposium — Influence on Environment and Health of Radiation”. This meeting was aimed to estimate the potential health risk of the radioactive materials leaked from the power plants and to study effective ways of protection. Speakers from a wide variety of fields reported their on-going research associated with this disaster and discussed their evaluation of the health effects based on medical evidence¹⁻⁷⁾.

At that time, huge amounts of information, varied in terms of accuracy and veracity, spread throughout Japan, often causing panic among the people of the Tohoku and Kanto areas. Most residents had no proper means to judge the validity of the information. At present, the environmental radiation of Fukushima city where Fukushima Medical Association locates is located, has dropped from 1/10 to 1/100 of the maximum observed on March 15-16, 2011. It may seem to people visiting Fukushima city that it has almost fully recovered from the disaster when they see the on-going activities of the downtown area. However, in the depths of the minds of the Fukushima residents, a dark stigma caused by the nuclear power plants explosion still remains. To date, thousands of citizens have voluntarily evacuated to distant locations, and they remain at those locations even now.

To collectively study the accumulated data on environmental radiation that could affect human health, Fukushima Medical Association held another symposium on the 10th of October, 2013 at Fukushima Medical University, which has played a central role in the health- and medical-care of the

people of Fukushima Prefecture, being the sole medical school. In this symposium, researchers from the university or Fukushima Prefecture, medical doctors and healthcare workers each presented their data obtained since the accident. Included were reports on the transition of environmental radiation as an external radioactive source, examination of radioactive materials in drink, foods or milk as internal radioactive sources, the first report of thyroid examination on Fukushima-residing children under 18-years old, and evacuation-related health risk assessment.

Starting from this issue, Fukushima Medical Journal will publish a series of reports by the speakers. What happened at the nuclear power plant was very nearly a catastrophic accident of an unimaginable scale. However, as detailed in each report, the total radiation dose to citizens has been controlled to the level of natural radioactivity from the very early stages after the accident by the strictest restriction of food and drinks. Hence, the health risk of Fukushima residents has been practically limited to external exposure immediately following the accident, when no effective evacuation was made. Evaluation of the health risks of low-level radiation requires long term observation. This series of reports is the first series of this observation.

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