



# ANTI-AGING MEDICINE COMES OF AGE

Japanese medical doctors and researchers endeavour to promote people's healthy aging through **ACTIVE INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH** and social outreach

**In the era of longevity**, anti-aging medicine is important not only for individuals but for society as a whole. Extending people's healthy lifespan and reducing medical expenses while maintaining the labour force is a top priority in countries such as Japan with a rapidly aging and shrinking population. Thanks to recent advances in the biological sciences, researchers are now able to intervene in aging processes at the molecular and cellular levels.

"It's time to use the scientific insights we have gained to directly enrich people's daily

lives," says Shigeo Horie, president of the Japanese Society of Anti-Aging Medicine and professor and chairman of the Department of Urology at Juntendo University's Graduate School of Medicine.

## **INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH**

The society and its affiliated organization — the Japan Anti-Aging Foundation — have an unconventionally open modus operandi, which is characterized by a focus on interdisciplinary research and educating the general public

about the latest medical breakthroughs.

"Medical research needs to move out of silos," says Horie. "Nowadays, much medical research has become excessively specialized. But anti-aging medicine is so complex it's important to exploit elements of many advanced research fields at the same time." The society consists of 9,000 practitioners and researchers with a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and provides opportunities for them to learn from each other. For example, researchers

investigating a range of areas, such as longevity-linked sirtuin genes, bacterial flora in the intestine, and coenzymes involved in metabolism, gathered at the 2017 annual meeting to discuss the mechanisms of aging.

In 2015, the society launched an open access journal called *npj Aging and Mechanisms of Disease*, which covers all relevant disciplines of aging research. Two of the world's leading researchers in the field — David Sinclair from Harvard Medical School and James Kirkland from the Mayo Clinic,



Ryuichi Morishita, vice president of the Japan Anti-Aging Foundation (second from left), and Katsunobu Kato, minister for the MHLW (second from right), at the second Anti-Ageing Japan fair held in Tokyo in collaboration with Fuji Television.



The society's 18th annual meeting will be held in May 2018

<http://www.mediproduce.com/18jaam>



Shigeo Horie, president of the Japanese Society of Anti-Aging Medicine

United States — have been invited to speak at the society's annual meeting next year, scheduled for 25–27 May 2018 in Osaka.

#### FOOD WITH FUNCTIONAL CLAIMS

Meanwhile, the Japan Anti-Aging Foundation is working hard to “improve people’s health literacy, so they can take care of their health in a responsible way,” says Ryuichi Morishita, vice president of the foundation and professor of the Department of Clinical Gene Therapy at Osaka University’s Graduate School of Medicine.

The foundation played a role in developing Japan’s new labelling system called ‘Foods with Function Claims’. Two similar systems already exist in Japan, ‘Foods for Specified Health Uses’ (*tokuhō* in Japanese) and ‘Foods with Nutrient Function Claims’, but companies need to spend tens of millions of yen for human clinical trials and wait 3 to 5 years to receive government approval. Moreover, due to strict regulations, the claims made on these labels do not typically provide detailed

information — for example, a product might be labelled as “good for people who are concerned about bone health” rather than “helps prevent osteoporosis”.

The new system allows companies to develop health products in a much shorter time at less cost. They can put their products on the market after submitting evidence of systematic literature reviews and simply reporting the results to the Consumer Affairs

#### MEDICAL RESEARCH NEEDS TO MOVE OUT OF SILOS

Agency. They can also label function claims more freely, and include a greater level of detail at their discretion — which makes it easier for consumers to understand the merit of health products.

Since its introduction in 2015, more than 1,000 Foods with Function Claims have come to market, with products ranging from supplements and drinks to fresh foods such as mandarins, which a

producer claims helps prevent osteoporosis.

In collaboration with the society, the foundation supports companies in accumulating reliable evidence on safety and functionality to help develop Foods with Function Claims. “Using drugs is one way to maintain health, but making healthy people healthier with foods is also important for the sustainable growth of society,” says Morishita, who helped introduce the new system as a member of the government’s Regulatory Reform Promotion Council.

#### SHARING KNOWLEDGE WITH THE COMMUNITY

Social outreach is another key mission for the foundation. In mid-September 2017, it hosted, in collaboration with Fuji Television, the second Anti-Ageing Japan fair in Tokyo. The event was supported by four ministries including the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) and the Japan Medical Association, and attracted more than 65,000 visitors in four days. In the opening speech, Katsunobu

Kato, minister for the MHLW, discussed the government’s policy on health care.

The foundation is also working with local governments to bring the 2025 World Expo to Osaka, Japan’s second largest city. Under the theme of Designing Future Society for Our Lives, the Expo would present Japan’s accumulated wisdom on how to lead a healthy life.

“People’s health is closely linked with their social participation and relationship with other people,” Horie explains. “Future anti-aging research should take this element more seriously, and that’s why our efforts need to be so interdisciplinary and wide-ranging.” ■



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18th Scientific Meeting of the Japanese Society of Anti-Aging Medicine  
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