

Services and Housing for the Elderly in Japan ⑤

This is the 5th serialization of *Services and Housing for the Elderly in Japan*.

I'll introduce elderly care facilities, which draw attention from Asian countries, particularly from China, Korea and Taiwan, in this article.

Japan's population is aging at the rate the world has never experienced before.

In 1950, the population of people aged 65 and over accounted less than 5% of the total population in Japan. However, in 1970, it exceeded 7%, and in 1994, it reached over 14%. The aging rate continued to rise, and the population aged 65 and over, announced on September 16, 2024 (Respect for the Aged Day, one of the public holidays in Japan), was 36.25 million, accounting for 29.3% of the total population.

This age group is expected to reach 36.53 million this year or in 2025, when the baby boomer generation will all become 75 years old or older.

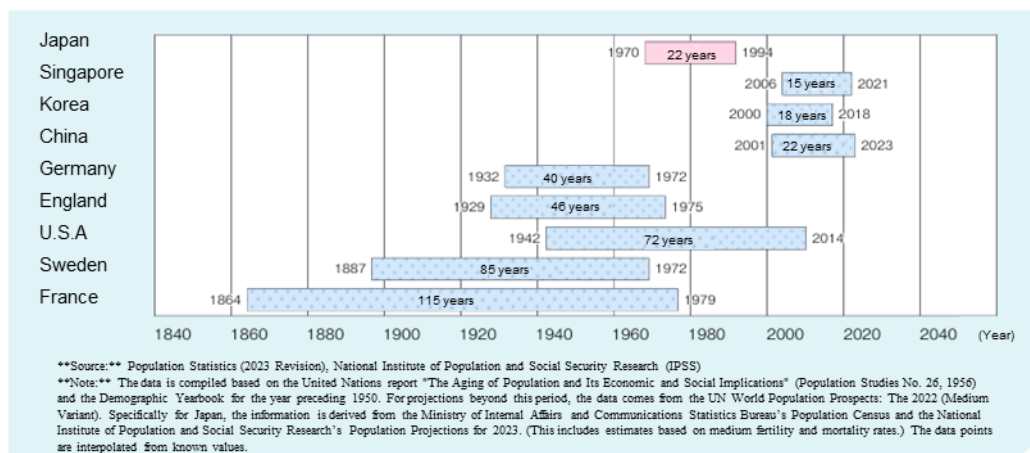
The population will be aging further as the number of people aged 65 and over increases while the total population decreases. It is predicted that one in three people in Japan will be aged 65 and over by 2037.

(The elderly population is expected to peak in 2043 at 39.53 million and take a downward turn.)

Average life expectancy is increasing and the number of the healthy elderly is also increasing. Some studies show that today's seniors are 10 years younger than the seniors of 10 to 20 years ago. That being said, however, among the late elderly, those who aged 75 and older, the number of people with dementia increases. In addition, the number of people who need a nursing care is about 8 times higher than the early elderly who are aged between 65 and 74. According to the estimate, the proportion of the late elderly population will be 25.1% of the total population by 2070, that is, almost one in four people will be aged 75 or older.

As mentioned earlier, Japan's aging population has occurred at the rate the world has never experienced before. If I compare the speed of aging in terms of the number of years required for the aging rate to double from 7% to 14%, called doubling years, they are 24 years for Japan, 115 years for France, 85 years for Sweden, and 72 years for USA. Even in countries considered having relatively short doubling years, such as England and Germany, they are 46 years and 40 years respectively.

Looking at Asian countries, it is predicted that some countries like Korea with 18 years and Singapore with 18 years; the aging will go further at the rate much faster than Japan.



Source: 2024 White Paper on Aging Society, Cabinet Office

When I visited elderly care facilities in Korea and Taiwan ten years ago, there was a huge difference compared to Japan, and I didn't feel any sense of urgency toward the aging population while I lived in Singapore from 2016 to 2020.

However, the actual situation and awareness about the elderly in Asian countries have changed in these 10 years. The digitalization and the introduction of robots related to the elderly care have been accelerating. In fact, when I took people engaged in elderly care business in Korea to elderly care facilities in Japan, some said that things in some areas are more advanced in Korea.

Against this background, there is a senior care facility in Ota-ku, Japan, that is constantly attracting visitors from overseas, mainly from Asia.

Several months ago, the delegates from the Tripartite Health Ministers Meeting among Japan, China, Korea visited the facility.

The facility is Social Welfare Corporation Zenkoukai's Santafe Garden Hills.

I myself have toured the facility for executives from major life insurance companies in Asia several times so far.

Two years ago, a major Japanese life insurance company acquired Japan's leading nursing care company, so I have no doubt that overseas insurance companies too are interested in Japan's nursing care business for various reasons.

The nursing care market is expected to continue growing due to the increase in average life expectancy and the aging population, and it appears that life insurance companies are looking at the opportunity to bring synergies to their business by utilizing the customer base of nursing care business operators.

Allow me to go over an overview of the Santafe Garden Hills first.

- Organization Name: Social Welfare Corporation Zenkougai
- Date of Establishment: December 7, 2005
- President: Hidemi Nishida
- Head Office: 6-4-17 Higashikojiya Ota-ku, Tokyo
- Number of Employees: 511, as of 2022
- Capital: JPY 825.5 million (FY2018)
- Locations: Operating nine locations based around Ota-ku Tokyo, including the Santafe Garden Hills, one of the largest complex facilities in Japan
- Organization Philosophy: Set an example of operation. Be a leader who bears the future of the industry

Zenkougai hopes to help nursing care service users continue to feel, think and take an action by themselves, and support them to live like a human till the end.



Operating 9 locations based around Ota-ku, including one of the largest complex facilities in Japan, the Santafe Garden Hills.

Some reasons for the Santafe Garden Hills attracting a lot of overseas visitors might be its advanced utilization of nursing care technology and its collaborative research including putting the research result in use.

Care robots include *Nemuri SCAN* (Paramount Bed Co. Ltd.) and *HitomeQ Care Support* (Konica Minolta QOL Solutions Inc.) for watching over the elderly, *D Free* (D Free Inc.) for excretion, and *Purete* (Kinboshi Inc.) for bathing. Many other types of care technologies are used in the facility, for example, for transfer assistance, communication, and nursing care ICT.

■ Usage Example of Care Technology 1: *Nemuri SCAN*

A sleep sensor, *Nemuri SCAN* which remotely monitors the sleeping condition of facility residents, or users, enabling a real-time tracking of their sleep status, is in use to help caregivers' rounds and room visits be efficient. In addition, it allows the facility to get a handle on their sleeping habits so that appropriate care is given to improve their QOL.

In other words, by monitoring the state of users' sleep in real time, caregivers can get release from unnecessary rounds and adjust the timing of room visits, and a PDCA cycle is in practice to increase users' QOL with the appropriate care plans with, for example, adjusted daytime activities and sleep, based on the understanding of users' sleeping habits by utilizing its alert function which notifies when users wake up or get out of the bed.

While every facility resident has a daily rhythm to a certain extent, it is sometimes hard for the facility to accommodate everyone. By analyzing one's daily life, his/her actual sleeping and excretion patterns would be visualized with numerical values so that the care is provided to users without burdening them. At the same time, it reduces caregivers' burden too.

■ Usage Example of Care Technology 2: Smartphone and Headset

Nowadays, more and more facilities are using headsets to communicate among staff in facilities, but Zenkoukai was very quick to introduce bone conduction headsets.

Smartphones and headsets are loaned out to the facility employees while they are on duty. With various smartphone apps, they can hear notifications from monitoring devices and receive group calls with other facility staff through the headset connected via Bluetooth.

When a ceiling-mounted motion sensor in individual rooms detects users taking a fall or getting out of the bed, it sends a notification to app., enabling facility staff to check a real-time footage. With a function to call for help, facility staff can move quickly.

By using bone conduction headsets, the staff can always keep their ears open for facility users.

■ Usage Example of Care Technology 3: *SCOP* (Smart Care Operating Platform)

SCOP, a DX system for nursing care business, allows facility staff to record the care provided to the users on the spot and thus eliminates the need for pen and paper or transcription work. Since all the notes of caution are shared through SCOP among facility employees, no meeting is required for that.

Currently most of the materials are still paper-base in nursing care business. However, there are no papers in the office space of the Zenkoukai's facilities but only PCs and office

equipment. I can still recall how I was surprised to see so many smartphones and their batteries lined up, seven or eight years ago.

I believe that the development and introduction of this Smart Care Operating System, SCOP, and the establishment of *Smart Care Worker* qualification are the reasons they constantly receive visitors from overseas.

I will discuss more about this SCOP in my next article.

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