

The Report of Activity at the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Disaster– After Experiencing the Nuclear Disaster”

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(English Translation by Red Cross Nuclear Disaster Resource Center)

~~~ Wishing for new steps towards the future ~~~

We established a first aid center at the evacuation center in Soma. Soon after that we had to close it down because of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident, and then moved to Kawamata. After the relief activities at the evacuation center in Kawamata, we moved to Nihonmatsu in the afternoon on March 13th to receive the body contamination screenings. Before the accident, I had a sense of security that such a severe accident as radioactive substances being spread around would never happen. However, “3.11” changed my mind completely. Radioactive substances had been widely spread in Fukushima that forced many evacuees unable to return to their lands, houses or homes they had lived for a long time. I received a big shock from the disaster, but more than that I felt how powerful the "bond" ["kizuna" in Japanese] between people was, and what a wonderful human beings we were!

A year and 3 months ago an incident, as if it was a nightmare, occurred. On Friday, March 11th, 2011 at 14:46, “The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami” --- it was an unprecedented, painful and severe disaster that we had never experienced.

When the earthquake occurred, I was working in the office with my colleagues. With the sudden strong quake, I immediately felt “It’s a big one. What would happen to us?” The seismic intensity in the City of Fukushima was 5-Upper on the seven-point Japanese scale. In the hospital there were outpatients waiting for their afternoon medical treatments, visitors, inpatients, and others. My initial response was running inside and outside the hospital with all the hospital staff members performing evacuation guidelines, facilities inspections, and carrying emergency supplies. As I saw the situation of the disaster via the news media, I could not believe the size of the catastrophe.

On Saturday, March 12th, I performed the relief activities as a member of the Fukushima Chapter Relief Team 1. I was in Minamisoma as well as in Soma in Hamadori (coast side) of Fukushima, and Kawamata that was located next to Iitate. In Minamisoma and Soma the damages by the tsunami were so large, and sea water invaded deep into the inside of the land. Many fishing boats were lying along the regular roads, all the vehicles and houses were washed away and nothing was left. At the beginning we headed to the Minamisoma City Hospital. Since the DMAT of our hospital had already been performing the relief activities there, we changed our destination and headed to the Soma City Disaster Response Headquarters. By the instructions given, we opened the first aid center at “Sports Arena Soma” that was the evacuation center and we began our relief activities. In the meantime the first news came about the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident. Although there were still many evacuees in the Arena, we closed the first aid center and started preparing to leave for Kawamata with the Shiga Chapter Relief team that had been performing their activities there. After arriving in Kawamata, we went out as a mobile clinic among the evacuation centers in the town. We were

in charge of four evacuation centers. Each evacuation center was full of evacuees – about 200 to 600. When we finished the mobile clinic for all of the four evacuation centers and returned to the Kawamata Hospital, which was designated as the standing-by station, it was already past midnight.

On the morning of Sunday, the 13th, our activity was to perform medical support for the evacuees and the local residents at the Kawamata Hospital, the standing-by station, since the physician of that hospital was unable to come to the hospital. In the meantime more and more evacuees from Futaba, Namie and Iitate, who were affected by the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident, had come by a series of multiple buses. We finished the medical support at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, then left the Kawamata Hospital to go to the Fukushima Gender Equality Center in Nihonmatsu for the body contamination screening process. After the screening none of our relief team members turned out to be positive so I was relieved although it may sound imprudent. As a matter of fact, I had almost no knowledge or information on radioactive substances and radiations then and therefore, to be honest, I felt uncertainly.

Now I would like to summarize what I felt about the nuclear power plant accident and the radiation. When I was young and became a member of Red Cross, prior to attending the “Nuclear Disaster Relief Training”, I asked a question to my senior staff that “If this nuclear power plant were to ever explode, what will happen to Fukushima? How do we perform relief activities at nuclear disasters?” Then the senior staff responded to me that “If radiation leaks out, nothing can be done. There is nothing we can do. However, a disaster like the nuclear power plant accident will never happen. So don't worry and just concentrate on the training.” Both my senior staff and I knew it would be big trouble if a nuclear accident occurred and the radioactive substances scattered, but in our minds we never doubted that such an accident would ever occur, and therefore, it would be safe and secure.

However, since “3.11” my belief has completely changed. The tsunami attacked us, the nuclear power plant exploded, the radioactive substances were widely spread in Fukushima and contaminated the soil, water, and atmosphere. There are still many evacuees who were not certain when they would be able to return to their beloved lands, homes and birthplaces. My heart broke when I thought of these evacuees. It is a fact that at schools and the public facilities, the radiation monitoring equipment are always measuring the air doses of radiation. This means that the safety and the security cannot be guaranteed without these continuous monitoring.

From now on we will have to live with the radiation for a long time. By facing up to and accepting that fact, while asking myself what would be important for going forward, I am wishing that the reconstruction for the future would come true as soon as possible.

Finally, the impact that this disaster gave me was far beyond what I could imagine. It was a very strong impact. However, more than that, I felt the strength of the force to connect a person to another person, i.e., the bond (“kizuna” in Japanese). I felt people were very sturdy, very kind and magnificent.

Now my feelings are aimed at taking new steps towards the future without heartache.