

Japan Yoga Therapy Society's Twelfth Annual Research Conference:
Yoga Therapy from the Perspective of Brain Science
**Tajimi, Gifu Prefecture
July 4-5, 2014**

By Chiaki Ishimura-Smillie

The Japan Yoga Therapy Society's Twelfth annual meeting and research conference was held in the central Japanese city of Tajimi, Gifu Prefecture, July 4-5, 2014. More than 1,300 attendees chartered "On Sahana Vavatu" together at the opening of the two-day conference, which included five lectures by medical doctors, 286 poster presentations, and nine presentations of case studies by members. Many health conditions were covered in the studies: included among them were lower back pain, high blood pressure, depression, and cancer.

Two notable guests from the United States were present: IAYT board president, yoga therapist, and retired cardiologist Dilip Sarkar, MD, FACS, CAP, and neurologist and Alzheimer's disease expert Vincent Fortanasse, MD, clinical professor of neurology at the University of Southern California. Dr. Fortanasse's presence reflected this year's theme, Yoga Therapy from the Perspective of Brain Science.

Keishin Kimura, president of the Japan Yoga Therapy Society, encouraged attendees to "study well, and take home what you learn to contribute to society through yoga." Echoing Kimura's message, Sarkar said: "I request all of you to be at the forefront of yoga therapy. Look at the research and study yoga therapy, then implement them in Japan to improve the health of Japanese society." English-Japanese translation was provided by Madoka Chase Onizuka, CYT, who was a presenter at SYTAR 2014.

Prior to the conference, Sarkar and Dr. Fortanasse traveled through Tokyo,

Fukuoka, Hiroshima, and Nishinomiya to present three-hour lectures to Japanese yoga therapists. Fortanasse, whose book, *The Anti-Alzheimer's Prescription*, has been translated into Japanese, talked about the illness and how yoga therapy is "one of the best treatments" for it, while Sarkar talked about yoga therapy in the United States. "We were moved by the [level of] knowledge of the yoga therapists," Sarkar told the conference.

Among the lecturers at the conference, Hiroyuki Shimada, PhD, a leading researcher at Japan's National Center for Geriatrics and Gerontology, talked about dementia, pointing to its rising incidence, particularly in Asia, and about the potential of cognitively stimulating exercises to prevent or slow its progress. Takahiro Ushida, PhD, professor at Aichi Medical University and an expert in chronic pain, spoke on the epidemiology and mechanisms of chronic illness in which lack of locomotor activity plays a part. Fortanasse gave a presentation on his anti-Alzheimer's program.

As of January 2014, the Japan Yoga Therapy Society has a membership of 2,469. The members include medical doctors and yoga teachers; most of them are graduates or students of a yoga therapy certification program conducted in partnership with the renowned Indian yoga research institute Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samshtana. More than half the members are also certified as yoga therapists by the society upon completion of the program and case-study presentations at the annual research conference.

The 2014 conference showcased some recent changes made in the yoga therapist training program. "In our past research conferences, the presentations of case studies were made without our own assessments, taking as their point of departure what the Western medical doctors had said of the clients, such as diagnoses of allergy or rheumatism, and then determining what might be helpful," Kimura told this writer. This year, however, all the presenters applied new assessment methods based on yoga's traditional wisdoms such as the Yoga Sutras and Bhagavad Gita in their case studies. "We

would like to further improve the precision of the assessments, as well as yoga therapy counseling theory," he said.

The second day of the conference was initiated by Kimura's morning yoga instructions, which attendees practiced seated in chairs to accommodate the large number of participants. During the conference, the Service Award was given by the society to three members for their volunteer activities in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, where they taught yogic breathing exercises to survivors of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and measured their effectiveness in improving their health. Also, five presenters were selected for the Society Award for their outstanding presentations. The conference was followed by a half-day yoga workshop open to the public that was attended by 400 local residents.

It was this writer's first attendance at the conference since moving to the United States from Japan in 2012. I believe that Japanese yoga therapists not only are eager to learn from yoga therapy practices worldwide but also have much to contribute. As Kimura said in closing the conference, "I hope that our work will help improve the well-being of people not only in Japan, but around the whole world."

The next conference will be held in Kobe on May 8-10, 2015. Kimura said cancer will be a major theme and Lorenzo Cohen, PhD, from MD Andersen Cancer Center will be a guest speaker.

If you would like to learn more about the Japan Yoga Therapy Society, the English page for the society can be found at <http://yogatherapy.jp/en/index.html>. *Chiaki Ishimura-Smillie, MSJ, is a certified yoga therapist and member of the Japan Yoga Therapy Society.*