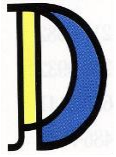


Excerpts from



**Japan Society for Dying with Dignity Newsletter  
No. 180, January 1, 2020**

**Main Contents:**

- New Year's Greetings by JSDD President Dr. Soichiro Iwao
- The 9<sup>th</sup> Session of Japan Living Will Study Workshop ( online conference )
- Dignity in Dying lies beyond ( Dignity in Living )
- Telephonic and Email Medical Consultations ( # 6 )

## New Year's Greetings

By Dr. Soichiro Iwao, JSDD President



We are facing a new year amidst a third wave of the COVID pandemic in Japan. I hope that you are all doing well.

Last April, we took our first step forward as a public interest corporation. For this new start, our regional chapter offices had planned increased promotional events such as forums, lectures and

other activities for last year, but we were forced to cancel them due to pandemic restrictions. In order to avoid stagnation of promotional activities, our headquarters started dispatching video presentations with supported from our board directors.

We were concerned that the majority of our elderly members would not have access to personal computers and smart phones to watch the videos, but they were viewed in high volume and received favorable reviews. We gained strong confidence in the use of technological tools to share information in the future.

### **ALS Patient's Assisted Suicide Case**

Last November, the case of an ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) patient's assisted death was widely reported in the mass media, and many inquiries were directed to our headquarters. We immediately responded by posting our official statement regarding the matter on our website. We sincerely hope that a lot of people took this opportunity to stop considering the topic of death as a taboo, and to deepen their discussions about the living will, dying with dignity, the right to choose how to die, and eventually reaching a unanimously consensual end of life medical care for themselves.

This pandemic has restricted many of our social activities and greatly impacted our economy. Even in the vicinity of Hongo, Tokyo where our headquarters is located, many offices and restaurants have closed down. JSDD is primarily funded by membership fees, therefore we must review our budget stringently and cut down our expenditure as much as possible.

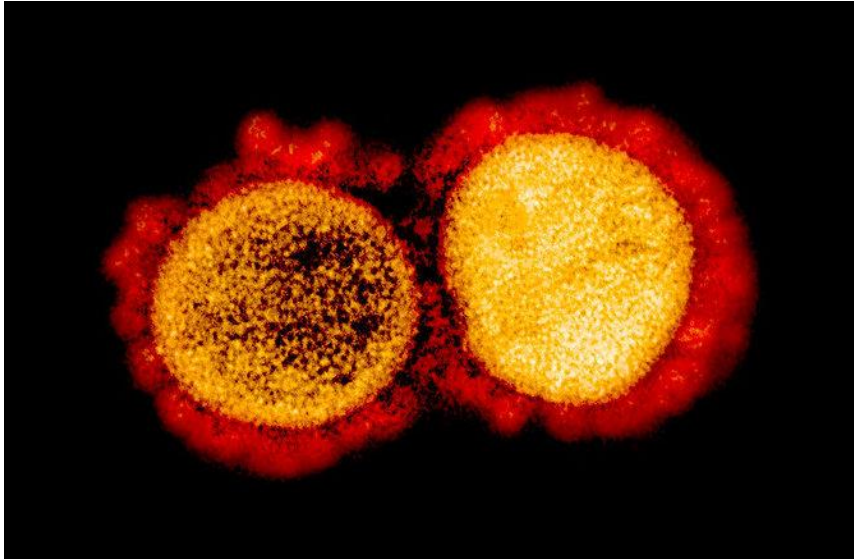
Our 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary will be this year. In preparation for the next several decades, we have compiled a small booklet outlining the path we have taken so far, which will be enclosed in an envelope with the next April issue of the newsletter. As a new public interest corporation, we will focus more of our efforts in research and studies surrounding end of life issues.

Lastly, your good health and happiness are in our prayers. We ask for your continued support by spreading the word about our activities in your communities, as well as welcoming any invitations or donations.

## **The 9<sup>th</sup> Session of Japan Living Will Workshop (Virtual Conference)** **The Pandemic and Dying with Dignity**

Key words: COVID-19, Choice on Life, Triage, Living Will

The 9<sup>th</sup> session of Japan Living Will Workshop was held as a virtual conference on November 28<sup>th</sup> as a third wave of the pandemic swept Japan. It's been over eight months since March 2020 when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global pandemic, a contagious disease affecting the whole world. Over 60,000,000 people were infected, and 1,500,000 people have died due to COVID. In Japan alone, 150,000 people have been infected, and 2,100 have died from it (as of 1 December).



COVID-19 (a new strain of the Coronavirus) named after its shape resembling the corona of the sun. Its diameter is about 1/660 of an average human hair.  
(Source of photo: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases)

In his opening statement, President Soichiro Iwao stated that medical institutions of the entire world are battling this unknown viral disease, for which we have no effective cure as of today. On one front, there are so many issues due to the pressure placed on medical treatments, urgency and capacity. We have a motto, “Live strongly and die peacefully,” but the reality now is that we are not even able to thrive in emergency rescue care, nonetheless, accentuate dignity in dying. How can we coexist with this virus? We’ll show you a perspective during this virtual conference, said Dr. Iwao as he began to explain the current Coronavirus situation and the intention of this conference.

### **Reemphasizing the importance of the Living Will**

Dr. Satoru Mitsuoka (a board director) who operates a clinic in Saga city coordinated the virtual conference as he did the past workshops. He summarized the topics for this conference as follows:

- 1) We currently face a paradigm shift with an unprecedented situation in which emergency rescue care is not available for some patients.
- 2) We must triage patients in case of shortages in medical resources.
- 3) Make recommendations regarding the best process for the distribution of artificial respirators while considering bioethical factors.
- 4) Some societies for dying with dignity and dying with medical assistance in other countries have published advance directives specifically amended for this pandemic.
- 5) Issues surrounding patients dying alone not with dignity, and devastated families who are kept from having decent departure/farewell rituals commonly performed due to COVID restrictions.

Other attendees were Dr. Masahiro Nomoto, Dr. Kazuhiro Nagao, who are both vice presidents of JSDD, as well as Dr. Yoshihiro Kitamura and Dr. Sumito Ogawa, who are both board

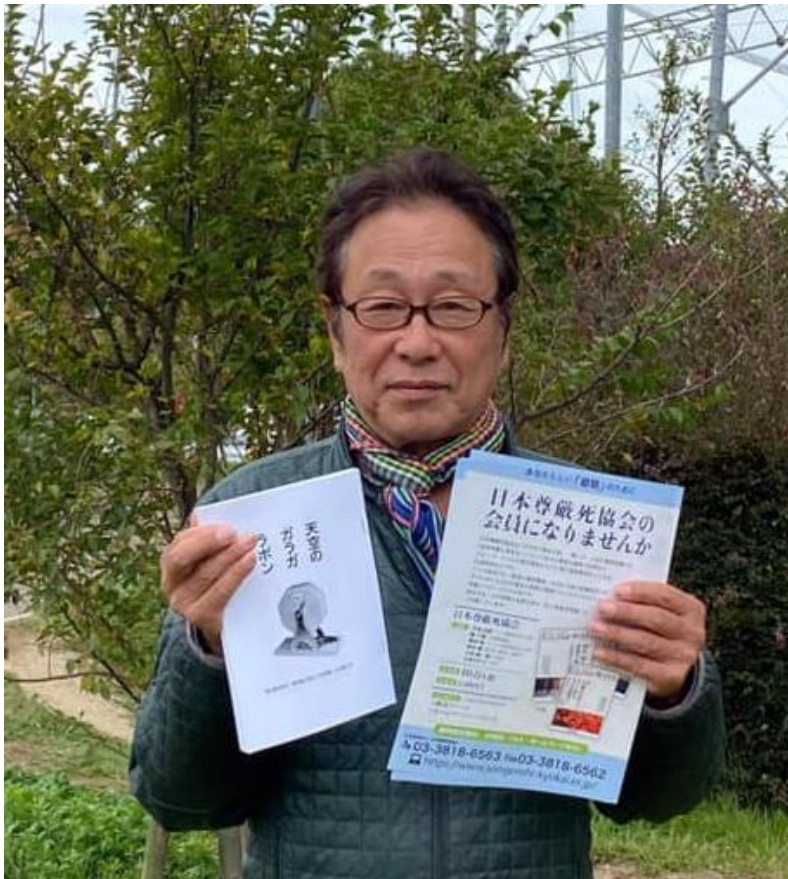
directors. They all presented their own perspectives on the current pandemic situation. Dr. Kitamura, who is a former professor of Nippon Medical School and a former Chief of National Institute of Infectious Diseases, explained his observations and assessment on the current situation. He gave a strong warning that we are facing a third wave of the outbreak based on various data, and that anyone can be infected anywhere, anytime. He said that the third wave has just begun, but the infection has been spread to all generations.

COVID-19 is a terrifying deadly virus causing sudden aggravation of severe breathing problems and loss of consciousness. Therefore, having a living will is absolutely crucial now more than ever; this pandemic has shown us the necessity to prepare a living will during this imminent situation.

The contents of this virtual conference with videos will be posted to our website soon.

## **Gathering of members**

### **Dying with dignity follows living with dignity**



I joined JSDD when my close friend doctor recommended it to me. When I was signing my living will, my hand was shaking. I realized that my declaration of dying with dignity was also my firm declaration of living the rest of my life with dignity. This was the moment my outlook on life changed significantly.

The more people live with dignity, the better our society is for all of us. With this thought in mind, I have recommended JSDD to many of my close friends and acquaintances.

I always carry JSDD's living will pamphlets (shown in the picture) and hand them out to people I greet on the road, people I meet at elderly gatherings, caregivers

and store clerks with whom I exchange communications oftentimes. There are so many people who had never considered the term, "dying with dignity," and I often show them my JSDD membership card.

This pamphlet is like my identification card. I was just another old man to these people before, but now I can feel intimacy in their smiles when our eyes meet.

There was a keynote speech called “You write the last chapter of your life story” by Mr. Kunio Yanagida, a non-fiction writer, on the front cover page of JSDD Newsletter #177. In my early 60’s, I started keeping a journal about my life from my childhood to today. I edit them and make about five prints every two months to give to my close friends. I also post them on my Facebook page for the public to read.

Annual membership fee of ¥2000 is the only cost; everything else is benefits we receive. I will continue to let people know about JSDD as much as possible in my own humble way. I tell them they can just fill out the JSDD application and go for a nice walk to the post office.

Written by Fujio Kawamoto (67), Fukuoka Prefecture

## Telephonic and Email Medical Consultations No. 6

“I can’t taste anything. Did I catch Coronavirus?”



**Q:** Three weeks ago, I ate tuna sashimi, and I couldn’t taste it. I was afraid that I might have caught the new strain of Coronavirus, so I went to my family doctor. The blood test revealed that my zinc level was very low. I started taking medication that my doctor prescribed, and since a few days ago, water started to taste bitter. Apparently, I can taste bitterness and sweetness, but I am afraid of having caught the Coronavirus.

-Male, age 78

### Advice:

One of the symptoms of Coronavirus is new loss of taste or smell. If you can taste bitterness and sweetness, then I think the probability that you are infected with Coronavirus is very low. You said your zinc level was low, and you are taking a prescription medicine for it. It may take you longer to improve this condition. In addition to taking your medication, I recommend that you also consume foods that are high in zinc, such as oysters, clams, liver, and nuts.

**Q:** Five days ago, I went to see my family doctor because I developed some symptoms of a common cold including coughing. The doctor prescribed me a common cold medicine, but the problem is that I have no appetite. What type of foods do you recommend when I don’t have an appetite? By the way, I live alone and have no family. I am worried about my future as I am getting very old.

-Female, age 84

**Advice:**

When you have a cold and have no appetite, my recommendation is to try to eat something that is warm and easily digestible such as porridge or noodles. You can also add protein with eggs. It is also important to consume a lot of water. You do not have to drink a lot at once, but take sips throughout the day to stay well hydrated. If you start to have difficulties in your daily routine, please consult your local support center before it's too late.

**Q:** I am taking a pain medication for spinal stenosis, and have also been doing rehabilitation exercises. Last fall, I started having pain in my hips and legs, which makes it difficult for me to walk. I am afraid that soon, I will be bedridden. Will morphine help reduce this kind of pain?  
-Male, age 75

**Advice:**

Morphine is used for sharp pain in orthopedics at times, but there are other treatments that may be just as effective, such as over-the-counter pain medication, pain relief patches, pain relief suppository, as well as nerve blocks and trigger point injections. You should talk to your family doctor first. While taking the prescription drug, you may try wearing a back support belt or brace for walking. If you are in pain while walking, you may take frequent stops to bend forward or sit on a bench for a while then resume walking. Even slow walking activates your muscles which should reduce some pain. You can also try some light stretching exercises before going to bed or when you first wake.