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***Getting Help: Reggie Pawle Explains How Psychiatry Works***

The number of people, including Japanese, using psychiatric medicines in the last 10-20 years has exploded around the globe. Many, many people are using various medications to deal with psychological difficulties such as depression, anxiety, extreme mood changes, and others. This is not something that you notice walking down the street looking at people, as part of the purpose of these medications is to help people be functional and participate in daily life without problems. It is in this way a “hidden” explosion, unless you know where to look and what the local psychiatric system is.

This “hiddenness” means that foreigners who are using medications and living in Japan often have difficulty both accessing and understanding how to use psychiatric services in Japan. Much of this difficulty is due to the language problem. There are a few English speaking Japanese psychiatrists who can be found through non-Japanese psychotherapists working in Japan. In Japanese psychiatrists most commonly use the words 心療内科 (*shin-ryo-nai-ka*), 精神科 (*sei-shin-ka*), or 神経科 (*shin-kei-ka*) to identify themselves and/or their clinics.

Once having found a Japanese psychiatrist then it is important to understand Japanese laws and customs regarding psychiatry. Firstly, regarding legality, only about half of the medications that are available in Western countries are legal in Japan. The ones that are legal are mostly the same as the Western medications, only with Japanese names. This means that Japanese psychiatrists are working with fewer choices than Western psychiatrists. One result of this is that one Japanese psychiatrist with whom I worked made his own prescriptions, blending a few medications together in varying

amounts depending on his assessment of the patient. Reports from clients of the results of this have been very mixed. Some people swear by it, others hate it. My counsel is whatever medication one receives, one needs to know exactly what they are taking, pay close attention to the effects, and if anything is problematic or questionable, ask the psychiatrist about this. If the psychiatrist is unresponsive, change psychiatrists.

A second result of fewer medications being available is that often Westerners cannot get from a Japanese psychiatrist the medication that they have been using at home. Seeing a Japanese psychiatrist regularly may mean having to change medications, which sometimes can result in very unpleasant experiences. There is an alternative to this. While Japanese law only allows legality for about half the Western medications, it also, strangely enough, has a provision in it that states that psychiatric medications that are not legal may be imported by individuals for individual use only, in a maximum of a one month supply. This means that anyone in Japan can have medications sent to them from people in foreign countries or they can order them via websites on the internet. While keeping the quantities small, my clients have never had a problem with this system. However, please don't misunderstand this – it does not mean all drugs can be imported this way, only psychiatric medications. Non-psychiatric drugs, such as cocaine, heroin, and marijuana, are very illegal in Japan.

Japanese psychiatric services are not cheap. However, if a person has Japanese National Health Insurance, it can be used with a licensed Japanese psychiatrist.

Regarding Japanese psychiatric customs the major consideration is how they work. Generally they see about five patients an hour, which means each patient has about ten minutes with the doctor. This is about enough time for a brief chat and the writing of a

new prescription. This means that each patient receives very little personal attention, so in many ways they have to educate (information can be found on the drug company's website) and monitor themselves. The patient needs to know what are the possible side-effects of their medication(s), should pay close attention to how their body/mind is responding to the medication, and be ready and prepared to speak about any problems or questions as soon as they walk through the psychiatrist's door.

This also means that the patient does not receive any psychotherapy counseling for their difficulties. Recommended is using psychiatric medications in collaboration with psychotherapy. Used wisely, medications give a person some space or breathing room from their difficulty, but do not suppress it completely. This allows being able to learn how to deal with their difficulty and eventually become medication-free. Additionally, the psychotherapist can communicate with the psychiatrist if needed, thus helping the client with this sometimes difficult aspect of their relationship with the psychiatrist. For more information and/or psychotherapy services, contact Reggie Pawle, Ph.D., 075-724-1356, [reggie\\_pawle1@yahoo.co.jp](mailto:reggie_pawle1@yahoo.co.jp); or search the profiles of the members of International Mental Health Professionals Japan at [www.imhpj.org](http://www.imhpj.org). English-speaking psychiatrists in the Kansai area (receptionists do not speak English!): Kyoto - Dr. Nagajima 075-462-3700, Dr. Ando 075-253-1808; Osaka – Dr. Takaishi 066-346-0777; Kobe – Dr. Kobayashi 078-333-9800.