

Supporting Child-rearing in the Community: Efforts of Nakano Medical Association, Tokyo, Japan

JMAJ 54(3): 180–185, 2011

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Key words Child-rearing support,
Evening hour initial emergency
pediatric care, Perinatal guidance,
Story telling

Introduction

Adjacent to Shinjuku City where Tokyo Metropolitan Government is located, Nakano City (Tokyo, Japan; hereinafter referred to as the City) has a total population of approximately 0.31 million residents. Approximately 38% of the total number of households (roughly 0.18 million) are nuclear families, which are married couples only, parents and their child(ren), and a single-parent and child(ren). The number of births in the City is approximately 2,000 per year with the total fertility rate of 0.78 (note: 1.05 for Tokyo and 1.34 for Japan, in 2007), and it is one of the most urbanized cities that show both a declining birth rate and increasing aging population. Nakano Medical Association (hereinafter referred to as NMA), in cooperation with the City, has been implementing its project called “child-rearing support” services as one of the main pillars of the NMA’s activities.

Nakano City’s Evening Hour Initial Emergency Pediatric Care Service

When faced with decreasing number and the



aging of pediatricians in the community, a local medical association must step in and support emergency pediatric care as a main provider of community healthcare. The City is also faced with the aging of pediatricians, and it is becoming more difficult for pediatric clinics to stay open outside of regular hours. Meanwhile, the demand for pediatric emergency care during evening/night hours is increasing as women have become

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This article is a revised English version of a paper originally published in the Journal of the Japan Medical Association (Vol.139, No.4, 2010, pages 905–908). This article is based on a lecture presented at Fiscal Year 2009 Maternal and Child Health Seminar “Toward the Realization of the Japan Medical Association Child Support Declaration IV” held at the JMA Hall on February 21, 2010.

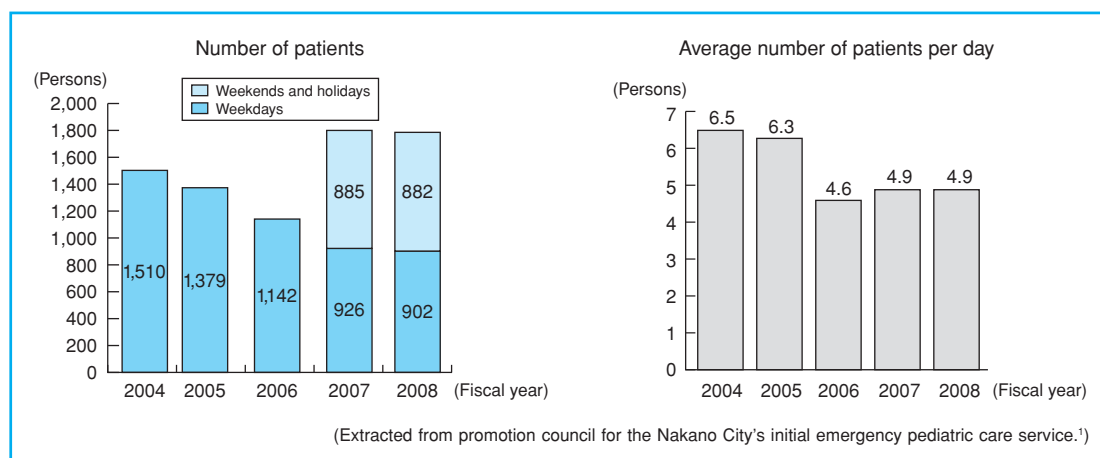


Fig. 1 Achievements of the Nakano City's evening hour initial emergency pediatric care service

more active in society. In view of the situation, NMA has repeatedly discussed emergency pediatric care in the City to seek ways to cooperate with the hospitals within the area.

After discussions, NMA submitted a plan to the City proposing to provide “initial emergency pediatric care service during evening hours,” which utilizes the emergency service of a general hospital that has been designated as a secondary emergency hospital for pediatric care by Tokyo Metropolitan Government. This movement also coincided with the improvement of the initial emergency pediatric care system in Tokyo. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the director of the health and welfare department of Nakano City Office at the time, “Nakano City's evening hour initial emergency pediatric care service” started in April 2002. From 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm on weekdays, NMA members provide initial emergency pediatric care, and the hospital pediatrician on-call at the general hospital would take over if hospitalization becomes necessary. In other words, this service is provided through a partnership between initial emergency care and secondary emergency care. This coordinated system received much attention from other cities in Tokyo.

Before starting the service, NMA recruited the participating physicians from medical facilities with pediatrics in the City, but the applicants included many physicians specializing in other areas. In order to compensate for the shortage of pediatricians, Tokyo Medical Association has

been conducting the “pediatric care training program for general practitioners” at secondary pediatric emergency hospitals since 2002. Making use of this program, 25 NMA members have received pediatric training so far, and are now participating in the City's initial emergency pediatric care service.

The service had been carried out smoothly until 2006. But unfortunately, the shortage of pediatricians forced the general hospital to close its secondary emergency pediatric care and the pediatric ward in April 2006. Consequently, the continuation of the City's initial emergency pediatric care service was put in jeopardy. However, the support of NMA members and the coordinated efforts with the general hospital allowed the service to continue, by having the NMA members filling in on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Furthermore, the service has been expanded since April 2007 to include weekends and holidays, providing initial pediatric emergency care during evening hours throughout a year.

As shown in **Fig. 1**, the number of service users temporarily decreased after the closure of the secondary pediatric emergency service of the general hospital, but it has increased since April 2007 when the service was improved to cover 365 days a year. Currently, the service is being managed without major difficulties. The residents highly evaluate this community medical care system that makes pediatric care available from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm. The NMA's plan for the future is to secure a pediatric ward within

the City in order to build a more reliable medical care system.

The First Pediatric Counseling Service Project (Prenatal and Postnatal Guidance on Pediatric Care)

As a model project for “Healthy Parent and Child 21” proposed by Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare of Japan, NMA conducted the “prenatal visits” project in 2001, which NMA has been implementing as its own project since then. This project presumed that cases are referred from obstetricians to pediatricians, but the coordination between the two were rather insufficient due to the decreasing number of obstetric facilities in the City and the increase in the number of mothers delivering in their parents’ towns. Through the “prenatal visits” project, a voice was raised from the community, which demanded to develop a support system for pregnant and postpartum women who have anxieties for parenting. With the public aid for prenatal checkups being promoted as part of the child-rearing support by the government in April 2008, and NMA proposed the City to expand the prenatal project into the perinatal project.

As a result, the City started a new child-rearing support project as of November 1, 2008, under the name of the “first pediatric counseling service.” The target population are pregnant and postpartum women up to three months after delivery. An expectant mother will receive a “ticket for the first pediatric counseling service” along with a copy of Maternal and Child Health Handbook when she registers a pregnancy with the City. The ticket can be used to get a referral to a pediatrician at the time of prenatal examination with her obstetrician or to receive consultation from a pediatrician directly if it is within three months after delivery. Currently 12 obstetric facilities and 23 pediatric facilities in the City are cooperating for this perinatal project.

Meanwhile, in response to the national guideline, the City expanded its existing home-visit project for neonatal care and started the “hello baby” project since April 2009, in which midwives and public health nurses visit all eligible households with newborns (less than four months of age). Since then, there have been cases that advices from the visiting midwives and public health nurses directly lead to the

use of the perinatal service. It is necessary for NMA to inform the Nakano residents of various resources available for medical consultation, and to continue working with the City to improve the “first pediatric counseling service” project.

Utilizing Nakano Medical Association Hall to Provide Child-rearing Support

Child-rearing support lectures

In June 2007, the construction of a new hall for NMA was completed. With the hope of making the hall well-known and familiarizing the Nakano residents with the NMA’s activities, the “Nakano Medical Forum & Nakano Association of Medical Sciences” has been held every year since 2008 on the 4th Sunday of June. As the first part of the forum each year, a special lecture for child-rearing residents is organized in the morning. The June 2008 lecture was given by Hideko Ise, the author of children’s books, on the theme of “the things we want to convey slowly and steadily.” The June 2009 lecture was given by the novelist Makoto Shiina on “important issues, and not-so-important issues.” Many residents gathered, and the lectures were conducted in a very pleasant atmosphere.

“Child-rearing Support Group” project

This new project, which started in May 2008, was born from the idea of using the new NMA Hall to provide child-rearing support for the Nakano residents. In Tokyo, there are several local medical associations implementing child-rearing support activities. NMA made a tour to Koishikawa Medical Association (Bunkyo City, Tokyo) to study its child-rearing support project called the “children’s story-hour.” Tranquility filled the room as soon as the story-telling started, and the magic of children’s books became evident in the children’s eyes as they stared at the book. A preparation committee established within NMA discussed the project planning and management, and named this new story-telling project “Child-rearing Support Group.” The service was to be offered every fourth Thursday of a month, from 1:30 to 3:00 pm. The plan was to include a mini-lecture by the NMA members and a story-telling. Questionnaires were to be distributed to the participants to utilize their comments in the future plans. The topics of the mini-lectures, which would reflect timely issues and requests from the

Table 1 List of the mini-lectures of Child-rearing Support Group service

Date	Presented by	Lecture topic
2008		
May 22	Dermatologist	Sun burn
Jun 26	Pediatrician	Summer heat weariness
Jul 24	Dermatologist	Heat rash
Aug 28	Ophthalmologist	Eye mucus
Sep 25	Surgeon	Baby's buttocks
Oct 23	Pediatrician	Beware of influenza
Nov 27	Otorhinolaryngologist	Ear care
Dec 25	Pediatrician	<i>Children Learn What They Live</i> (Christmas party)
2009		
Jan 22	Pediatrician	Stomach flu
Feb 26	Dermatologist	Dry skin
Mar 26	Dentist	Oral care
Apr 23	Pediatrician	Vaccination
May 28	Urologist	Baby's penis
Jun 25	Dermatologist	Pustular rash and insect bites
Jul 23	Pediatrician	Heat stroke
Aug 27	Nakano City Fire Dept	Emergency care for infants
Sep 24	Pediatrician	Allergies
Oct 22	Nakano City Child and Family Dept	Child-rearing support efforts in Nakano City
Nov 26	Urologist	Baby's penis, revisited
Dec 24	Midwife	Weaning
2010		
Jan 28	Nakano City Child & Family Dept	Toilet training
Feb 25	Pediatrician	Convulsion

participants, were to be examined and finalized by the committee. Depending on the topics, NMA are to seek assistance from other professionals, such as the dental association and Nakano City Child and Family Department (**Table 1**).

Regarding children's books, Nakano City Board of Education, which has been providing a library service for some years now to clinics located in the City as part of its community activities to promote reading, agreed to lend children's books to Child-rearing Support Group project as well. As for the project management, the Nakano branch of Japan Medical Women's Association, Shunko-kai, agreed to offer full cooperation, and the general operation of the project has been managed by them. To inform the Nakano residents of this event, leaflets are prepared monthly and distributed to medical facilities in the City, mainly pediatrics. The information is also made available on the NMA's homepage on the Internet.

There were concerns as to how many people would come to this monthly event, but more than

20 parents and children came to the first event of Child-rearing Support Group. Since then, the number of participants has gradually increased, also thanks to the additional help of text message exchanges among the participants promoting the project. Comments from the participants are used effectively in our efforts to improve the activities. For example, when a topic of weaning food was requested by some participants, a mini-lecture series on weaning food was organized with the cooperation of Nakano City Association of Independent Dietitians. Furthermore, it was decided to include a sing-along of children's songs, based on the suggestion made by a member of Shunko-kai.

Over time, more vaccination-related questions and concerns were raised from the participants. In response, NMA Vaccination Committee prepared the ideal vaccination schedule for children under one year of age (**Fig. 2**), which was used in a mini-lecture. To fully address the concern of each parent, individual counseling sessions were also offered after the event, focusing on vaccination-

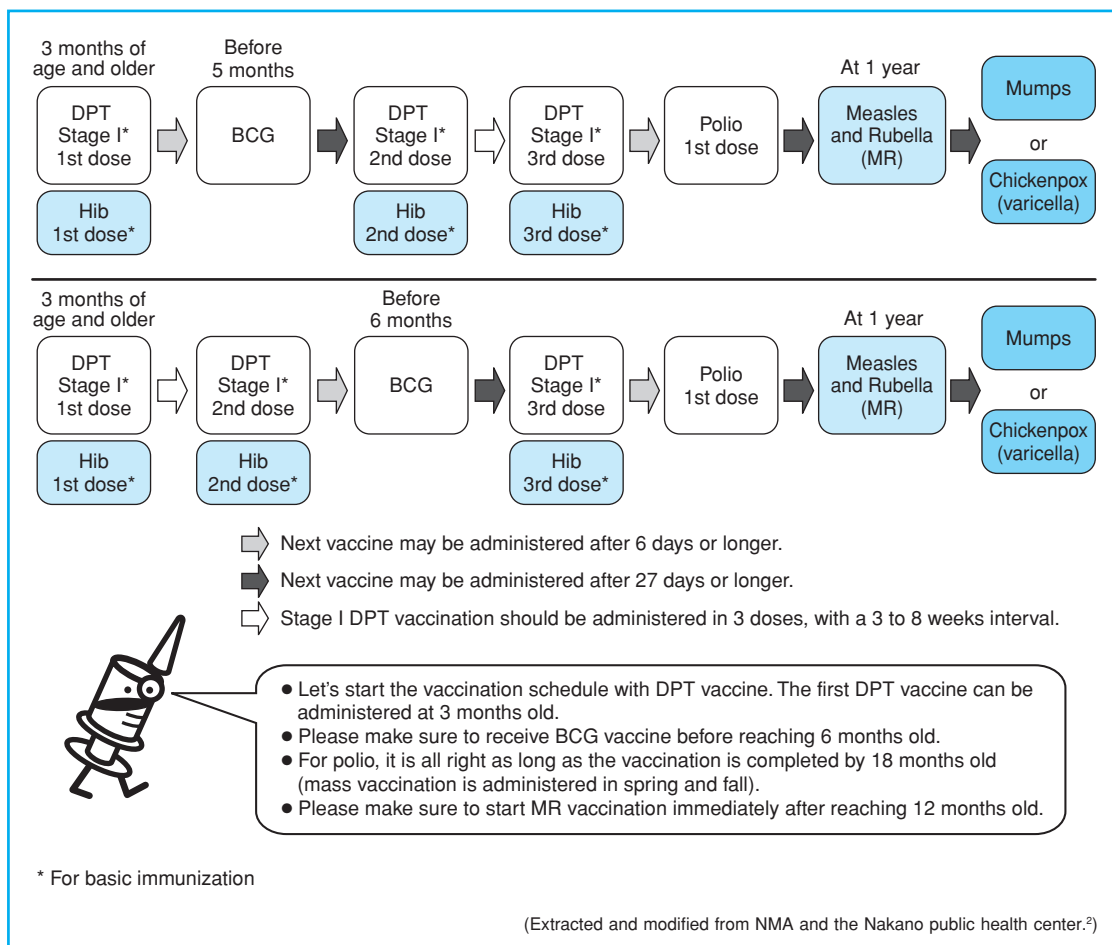


Fig. 2 Ideal vaccination schedule

related issues.

Over two years have passed since the launch of Child-rearing Support Group service, which fills NMA Hall with children's voices each month. We are receiving positive feedback from the participants that NMA Hall opens to the public for such activity. Some participants commented that they became familiar with how to respond to common disease, and some really felt the wonders of children's books. During storytelling time, the event area is filled with a warm atmosphere created by the parents and children who are completely immersed in the world of the book, and it is heartwarming to see them strengthening their bonds through books. Every day, mothers and fathers are struggling with child-rearing at home and in the community. We

fully intend on continuing the activities of Child-Rearing Support Group by adopting various ideas, so that NMA Hall would become a place of comfort for parents.

Concluding Remarks

Various anxieties weigh heavily upon parents who are raising a child. Children are indeed precious to parents, and they are also the treasures of society. In her poem *Children Learn What They Live*, Dr. Dorothy Law Nolte writes, "If children live with friendliness, they learn that the world is a nice place in which to live." We NMA shall embrace these words when we implement our activities and strive to make the community a nice place in which to live.

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