

Developing a rural generalist medical training program in Japan

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In Japan we have plenty of rural and remote areas, and many communities in them that require care, but no specialised program for rural medicine.

The awareness of this is rising. After the great east Japan earthquake of 2011, young doctors are increasingly shifting their focus from specialist to generalist care, especially in rural areas.

There is an amusing and paradoxical story concerning Kenjiro Setoue. Kenjiro Setoue is possibly be the most famous doctor in Japan. His story is featured in an extremely popular manga comic, 'Dr Koto's Clinic'. It is so popular that it was made into a television program and even translated into French.

He was a successful surgeon in a large urban hospital and had, by chance, moved to the small remote island of Koshiki-shima. That was back in 1978. Dr Setoue had only intended to stay for six months, but he has been there ever since.

His skills and reputation are great but young doctors working as general practitioners are unable to step into his shoes and do what he does. Rural islanders also find it difficult to accept other doctors, much less young ones.

A few years back, Dr Setoue fell down the stairs and suffered a serious injury. His secretariat had difficulty finding a stand-in.

To take over from people like Dr Setoue we need to equip our young doctors with the proper training and guidance. This is why we need to develop a rural generalist medical training program in Japan.