

EDITORIAL

Helping people with dementia

In fiscal 2005, there were an estimated 1.7 million people aged 65 or over who were suffering from dementia and needed nursing care. The number of such people is predicted to climb to 2.5 million in fiscal 2015 and 3.2 million in fiscal 2025. The government is pushing various measures to cope with the situation. We hope that these efforts will help eradicate prejudice against people having dementia and lead citizens to expand their support to such people and their families.

People with dementia suffer from the deterioration of intellectual faculties such as memory, concentration and judgment as their brain cells have been damaged or have died because of such factors as Alzheimer's disease and damaged blood vessels in the brain. It must be noted that people in their 40s and 50s can suffer from dementia.

The health ministry plans to train 1 million "dementia supporters" by the end of fiscal 2009. Training sessions are being held at schools, communities and workplaces. The ministry hopes that dementia supporters will help sufferers of dementia and their families in their daily lives and introduce them to various social and health services.

The ministry is also pushing a project to build one or two dementia-related model areas in each prefecture. Special coordinators will help establish a network between hospitals, nursing-care facilities and other health-service organizations. Drilling sessions will be held to search for dementia sufferers who have gone missing. The ministry, together with the national land ministry, is also writing guidelines for community designs, which will include landmarks to prevent dementia people from getting lost and an increase in the number of benches and rest rooms to help such people.

As various measures are carried out, citizens can do their part by striving to understand the feelings of people suffering from dementia and providing assistance when possible.

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