

Positive Health

A broad concept of health connected to well-being

The desire to live in good health until the end of one's life is a universal aspiration. Originating from the Netherlands, the broad health concept known as "positive health" emphasizes the importance of having a sense of purpose in life, and recognizes resilience – defined as the ability to live positively even in the presence of illness – as a key component of health. The concept has already been introduced in Japan in the form of initiatives linked to well-being, and here we would like to share the latest trends from the perspectives of medical practitioners and researchers.

Positive Health Initiatives: from Perspectives of Healthcare Professionals

Dr. Hiroyuki Beniya

Representative of Positive Health Japan / Founder of Orange Medical & Social Group



Positive health training session for Japanese participants in 2025

The Encounter with Positive Health

We are a medical welfare and community development team operating in Fukui and Nagano, providing services such as home medical care (including home nursing), community care (e.g., outpatient services, preventive care, and elderly care), and activities for children (e.g., school health services, sick child care, and creating spaces for children with medical needs), as well as initiatives for community revitalization (including community space development, cafes, and fitness gym operations).

As we are engaged in practices centered around healthcare, the individuals we primarily encounter are those referred to as "patients," i.e. people with illnesses or disabilities. While different patients have different illnesses or disabilities, they do not merely lead lives as people overshadowed by affliction. In fact, many patients maintain their well-being. However, some people in society may find it contradictory to maintain well-being while having an illness or disability. Yet, in local communities, we often see individuals

referred to as patients who exhibit a healthy appearance.

Reflecting on what health truly means, I was exposed to a new concept emerging from the Netherlands during my work in the field. The concept is called "positive health." According to the concept, health is defined as "the ability to adapt and manage oneself autonomously when faced with social, physical, and emotional challenges." This means individuals are healthy as long as they have the energy and ability to navigate their own conditions while controlling their "disease" or "infirmity." Even if a person has neither of these conditions, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as complete physical, mental, and social well-being, rather than mere absence of disease or infirmity.

Indeed, the many patients I encounter in local community and home medical care settings are living with illnesses yet remain "healthy" in this sense. So, as a team my colleagues and I began to study positive health and initiated its application in the field of community healthcare.

Practical Applications in the Field

In real clinical settings, utilizing the concept of positive health in every situation allows for ongoing dialogues with patients while

recognizing their strengths and goals. Unlike the traditional medical approach that focuses on patients' symptoms or issues, this concept seeks a truly patient-centered form of "health" by exploring and discovering patients' strengths in order to pursue it together. I find it rewarding to meet in person with individuals who are actively moving towards that goal. Serving as a nursery and school physician, I also utilize the concept of positive health when conducting health checkups on children at nurseries, kindergartens, and elementary and junior high schools. Such checkups are not about passive health bestowed by a doctor, but rather a process in which children, through dialogue, can discover how they would feel empowered and how they could live with a sense of purpose.

Towards the Future of Japan

Encountering the concept of "positive health," I began to believe that this perspective on health is precisely what Japan, with its aging society and where eradicating disease and avoiding death are challenging, needs. Despite the increasing number of elderly individuals with illnesses or physical impairments, as well as the rising mortality rate in our country, we can still consider it a healthy and happy nation.



With Dr. M. Huber (2024), an advocate of positive health

Positive Health Japan

In June 2023, Positive Health Japan was established as a general incorporated association with the aim of promoting public health and enhancing well-being. The organization holds positive health training sessions for Japanese participants as part of its public awareness activities.
<https://www.positivehealth-j.com/>



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I am engaged in research on “social determinants of health.” As illustrated in the figure, health is affected by various social factors and economic conditions, with poverty and the environment where one lives being prime examples. Another is the importance of ties with one’s local community, as isolation and loneliness can have an impact on physical and mental health comparable to that of smoking.

Creating an Environment for Spontaneous Well-being and the Role of Social Prescribing in the Endeavor

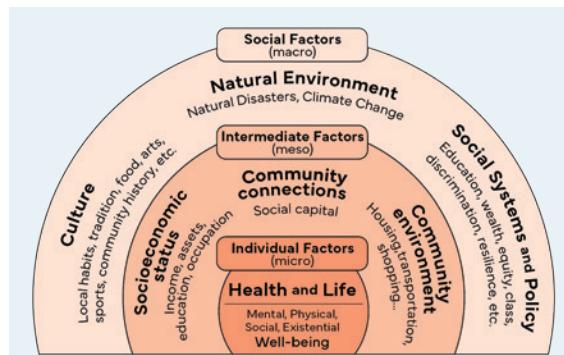
Considering the aforementioned issues, for the purpose of public health, the focus should be placed on creating environments in which individuals can naturally become healthier just by living, rather than on providing individual guidance. Instead of offering personal guidance such as “You should socialize more,” it is more effective to create environments and systems that naturally foster connections between individuals.

“Social prescribing” is an initiative that aims to create such environments by prescribing connections to society, much like prescribing medicines. Patients visiting a hospital have different personalities, and some of them struggle because of their lack of social connections. Counselors, who are also known as link workers, work alongside such individuals to help them find connections that suit their needs.

During my residency, there was a young woman named Ms. A suffering from an intractable disease who visited the emergency department almost every midnight and requested a drip, as she was experiencing pain throughout their body. What we intravenously administered was normal saline, which does not contain any analgesic components. However, after a short talk with her, Ms. A went home, saying “I feel relieved now.” I can only imagine the immense stress and hardship that she experienced being overwhelmed by such anxiety almost every night. I often reflect on what I could and ought to have done for

Possibilities of Positive Health: Insights from a Researcher’s Perspective

The issue of isolation and loneliness, which can potentially impact human health, has brought attention to the strategy known as “social prescribing,” which emphasizes connections with people. Dr. Kondo, a graduate of the Positive Health Japan Training Program, will introduce related initiatives.



Conceptual diagram of social determinants of health

her as a physician, feeling the limitations of my abilities at the time. Today, if I could offer advice to myself as a medical resident then, I would like to tell myself about the concept and case examples of social prescribing.

Dialogues on Positive Health that Help Us Envision “How We Want to Live Our Lives”

Health is an instrument, not a goal. In reality, however, many people are overwhelmed by illnesses and symptoms, leaving them with little room to think about how they wish to live; they are fully occupied with the daily management of their health. Now I feel it might have been beneficial for Ms. A if there had been someone to discuss her way of living and lifestyle with her. Regrettably, simply listening to her on the side during on-call shifts did not suffice for adequate consultation.

Expectations for a Community Model Combining Social Prescribing and Positive Health

Positive health is likely to be highly beneficial for supporting patients like Ms. A and advancing social prescribing. For example, the “spider web” chart could have served as an effective tool for exploring social prescribing for Ms. A by considering how she perceived her situation at the time and how she wished to live in the future.

There is also a growing movement toward integrating social prescribing and positive health into community activity models. For instance, in the Netherlands, where the concept of positive health originated, we have observed numerous initiatives along



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this line. And in Japan, the city of Yabu, Hyogo Prefecture has established the Social Prescribing Promotion Division at the city hall for the purpose. They make a “spider web” chart app available to all residents of the city. This approach aims to foster rich connections within the community, with each resident collaborating with link workers by using the spider web chart to visualize their desired lifestyle.

As a researcher, I expect that the effectiveness of such local models will be demonstrated in the future, alongside advancements in model improvement and dissemination.



Spider web chart: Rate yourself with a number between 0-10 and place a dot on all 6 dimensions: “Bodily Functions,” “Mental Well-Being,” “Meaningfulness,” “Quality of Life,” “Participation,” and “Daily Functioning.” This tool helps individuals in pursuing a forward-looking life by encouraging self-reflection and re-evaluation of personal values.

The digital spider web chart is available for download and printing from the Yabu City website. Give it a try!

- Download from the social prescribing portal site “Tsunagaru DAY YABU” (only available in Japanese)
<https://tsunagaru-day-yabu.jp/about-positive-health/>



When Ms. Michiko Feehan attended the meeting of the Japan R-SUD Association as an observer, we heard about her aspiration to deepen mutual understanding between the USA and Japan and requested her to contribute an article to KIZUNA News.



Insights and Reflections from the Mansfield Fellowship

Michiko Feehan

Biomedical Engineer / U.S. FDA Medical Device Reviewer / Mansfield Fellow 28th Class

During my year in Japan on the Mansfield Fellowship, John F. Kennedy's words—For of those to whom much is given, much is required.—served as a guiding principle. Guided by this idea, I sought to build on my experience as a biomedical engineer at the U.S. FDA while gaining a deeper understanding of Japan's perspectives, policies, decision-making, and the cultural and technical landscape surrounding medical device innovation, international harmonization, and regulatory review. I focused on understanding how key stakeholders support medical innovation and regulatory collaboration, while contributing to stronger U.S.–Japan relations and advancing global health goals.

The Mansfield Fellowship embodies a mission inspired by Mike Mansfield (1903–2001), whose distinguished service as U.S. congressman, Senate majority leader, and ambassador to Japan exemplified dedication to public service and international partnership. Ambassador Mansfield regarded the U.S.–Japan relationship as “the most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none.” The fellowship allows U.S. federal employees to work alongside counterparts in Japan's government and NGOs, exchanging ideas, comparing approaches to policy and innovation, and fostering collaboration across cultural and societal boundaries.



The 28th Mansfield Fellows

During the past year, I worked in various organizations, including PMDA¹, AMED², the National Institute of Health Sciences (NIHS), the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), and the Japan Federation of Medical Devices Associations. Moreover, I observed legislative leadership firsthand in the office of Diet Member and Former Foreign Minister, Hon. Kamikawa Yoko. Each office welcomed me by clearing a desk, and as I joined the bustling teams, the hum of conversation and rhythm of daily work made me feel fully part of the office.

During my fellowship, I witnessed milestones such as PMDA opening its first North American office in Washington, D.C., and attended AMED's 10th anniversary celebration, which highlighted its achievements in advancing medical research and innovation. These experiences offered a window into how institutions collaborate, navigate complex national and global challenges, and leverage their expertise to advance Japan's leadership in global health, innovation, regulatory collaboration, and international harmonization.

Across each placement, I was struck by the dedication of staff working with a deep sense of responsibility for Japan's future. Each placement underscored the power of connection—through language, professional engagement, and cultural exchange—and deepened my appreciation for the collaboration required to achieve meaningful outcomes across borders.

Sound of Tsugaru Shamisen

Alongside my professional placements, I explored Japan's culture by learning the Tsugaru shamisen. This experience immersed me in community and collaboration, connected me with tradition, and offered

insights into history, discipline, and attentive listening—qualities that shaped how I work with others. My love for music began in childhood with the saxophone in jazz ensembles, where I discovered the joy of creating together—combining strengths, listening closely, and learning from one another. Studying Tsugaru shamisen under Koji Nagamura deepened my musical foundation and offered a window into the instrument's rich cultural heritage. I was fortunate to learn from my mentor and peers, whose generosity, patience, and artistry made each lesson a shared experience. Attending the 43rd Tsugaru Shamisen World Cup in Hirosaki, culminating in a final performance at the Kanazawa Hyakuman-goku Festival, allowed me to absorb the energy, passion, and depth of tradition while feeling part of a living musical community. Returning to the instrument as a beginner encouraged me to embrace the learning process and deepen my connections with others. Music became a bridge, teaching patience, humility, inclusion, and openness—lessons I now carry back to America, along with the joy and human connection it creates. I look forward to taking part in my hometown Sakura Matsuri in Washington, D.C., by sharing Japanese music and contributing to continued cultural exchange.



Tsugaru shamisen experience that offered great insights

Bridging Perspectives

These experiences, both professional and cultural, reinforced a key lesson: true innovation arises at the intersection of diverse perspectives. Across U.S.–Japan initiatives and different professional backgrounds, I saw how different experiences and ways of thinking can spark ideas that might not emerge in isolation.

During my time at MHLW, I observed scientists, legislators, regulators, and industry partners discussing new medical device policies. Each brought a different perspective, and by combining these viewpoints, they developed solutions that could not have been created alone. With guidance from generous mentors who openly shared their expertise, I gained firsthand insight into Japan's decision-making, policy development, and approach to innovation. I now carry these lessons back to Washington, D.C., where they inform my work at the U.S. FDA and continue to deepen my perspective on U.S.–Japan collaboration.

People-to-People Connections and Shared Futures

Living and working in Japan for a year through the Mansfield Fellowship showed me the power of connection—across people, disciplines, and cultures—in advancing shared goals. From collaborating with Japanese colleagues in medical device regulation to observing how innovation and regulatory collaboration support global health, I was continually inspired by the generosity, warmth, and openness of those I met. Outside the office, studying Tsugaru shamisen offered parallel lessons in tradition, collaboration, and attentive listening, deepening my appreciation for cultural exchange. Together, these experiences continue to shape my commitment to strengthening U.S.–Japan relations, fostering mutual understanding, and applying these insights to my work and life in the U.S.



What is the Mansfield Fellowship Program?

A practical intergovernmental training program between Japan and the United States, named after Mike Mansfield, who served as the U.S. Ambassador to Japan for many years. The aim is to foster Japanese specialists by dispatching employees from the U.S. federal government to Japanese ministries.

¹ PMDA: Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Agency

² AMED: Japan Agency for Medical Research and Development

Applying What I Learned at the International Conference to Practice and Research

Kanako Fujimoto

A doctoral student at the Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering in Health Systems, Okayama University, and a Certified Nurse in Infection Control

My name is Kanako Fujimoto, and I am a doctoral student at the Graduate School of Okayama University. With the generous support of the Matsumoto Global Foundation, I participated in the APIC25 Annual Conference & Expo, held in Phoenix, Arizona, USA, in June of this year. There I presented part of my research on infection control in elderly care facilities. First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for the invaluable support that made this opportunity possible.

Unexpected Detour in San Diego

The journey began with an unexpected turn. Due to the delay in my outbound flight, I missed my scheduled connection at San Diego Airport and had to stay overnight there. Although I arrived a day later than planned, the unexpected itinerary allowed me to explore the beautiful port city of San Diego and savor fresh shrimp dishes at local restaurants. The following day, when I finally arrived in Phoenix, I was met with the distinctive dry heat of the desert climate. Cacti were planted here and there throughout the city, and as I headed towards the venue, I became acutely aware of the climatic differences from Japan.

Intense Debates on Infection Prevention Practice in Long-Term Care Facilities

The venue was bustling with many infection preventionists (IPs), and I could feel the strong commitment for infection control in the United States. One particularly impressive session for me was about enhanced barrier precaution (EBP) as prevention measures against drug-resistant organisms in long-term care facilities. EBP emphasizes the consistent use of personal protective equipment (PPE) during routine care for residents who may carry or spread drug-resistant organisms. In this session, there was a lively discussion on how to implement EBP in long-term care facilities, which also serve as residents' living environments. The session highlighted that, much like Japan, there is an ongoing effort in the United States to explore practical, on-site solutions.

The Poster Presentation and Next Step Forward

My poster presentation was scheduled before lunchtime on the second day of the conference. It was challenging to prepare for the presentation, but many pieces of advice and words of encouragement I received from professors



My poster presentation

and other mentors were truly motivating. On the day of the presentation, I felt nervous as I had expected, but I was able to make my presentation on my research on infection control practice in Japanese elderly care facilities and explain my work research to many attendees who stopped by. At the same time, there were moments when I found it difficult to fully express my thoughts in English. However, I am determined to channel this experience into further effort and growth.

The valuable experiences this time made me realize once again that international conferences provide not only a platform for sharing on-site efforts and research findings, but also important opportunities to engage in ongoing discussion about practical challenges. With this in mind, I would like to continue actively participating in international conferences and discussions, while gradually applying insights I gain to both practice and research. Once again, I am deeply grateful to the support that enabled me to participate in APIC25.

Chitenge

- African print fabrics Education Officer of Rocinantes

Education Officer of Rocinantes **Kayo Kawahara**

In Zambia, one of the areas where Rocinantes is active, vibrant fabrics called "chitenge" attract people's eyes. Those fabrics are printed with bold patterns in primary colors like red, yellow, green, and blue. Women style the fabric like a skirt around the waist, while men enjoy wearing it as a shirt. Chitenge fabrics show up nicely against the sky blue and the green of the trees, and uniquely enhance urban landscapes of the city. Moreover, they are not only used in daily life but also play a role in ceremonies, in the forms of dresses and turban-style caps that embody a sense of pride in traditional ethnic attire. Chitenge is an icon of the people's way of life and culture. I actually wore it in an arranged form to convey its appeal in Japan, and it caught the attention of the Chairman, Mr. Matsumoto. Then we celebrated his birthday by giving him a custom-made necktie and fabric flowers crafted from chitenge fabrics.



Fabric flowers and a necktie made of chitenge fabrics

Matsumoto Global Foundation Activity Report

Matsumoto Global Foundation Lecture - an invitation project

On April 17, 2025, the 114th Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society of Pathology was held in Sendai, inviting Professor Günter Klöppel from the University of Munich, Germany for a lecture sponsored by the Matsumoto Global Foundation. The lecture provided an opportunity to foster Japanese pathologists with an international perspective. After the lecture, gratitude was expressed to Professor Klöppel by the event organizer, President Toru Furukawa of Tohoku University and Chairman Matsumoto of the Matsumoto Global Foundation.

Foundation badge rolled out

Matsumoto Global Foundation has created an original "pin badge" carrying its logo featuring a design of three gold rings. This exemplifies the foundation's principles of possessing an "Altruistic mind," "Cooperative mind," and "Humorous mind."

