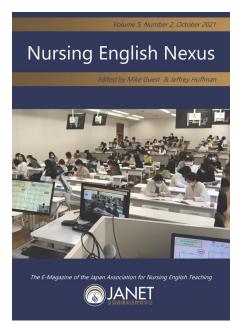
# Nursing Competencies: Adopting Plain Japanese in Patient Care

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Japan Educational Foundation Shuto Iko College of Medical Care & Welfare



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#### Nursing Competencies: Adopting Plain Japanese in Patient Care

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**Keywords**: multicultural competencies, plain Japanese, healthcare interpreter, English education, language barrier

With increased globalization, as seen in the rising number of foreign residents in Japan as well as the increasing number of visitors, the internationalization of medical fields in Japan has been accelerated. It is essential for nurses, who play a vital role in medical care of non-Japanese, to have multicultural competencies, making English education in nurse training of great importance. It is necessary for nurses to communicate directly with foreign patients in English in some cases. In addition, in those cases when patients do not speak English, and when it is difficult to translate Japanese into the target language directly with the help of translation devices, it might be possible to use English as the mediating language to find the words we need. English is also the most useful means of obtaining information directly from other countries around the world.

At the same time, government offices and some industries in Japan, especially the tourism sector, are promoting the use of *Plain Japanese* in communicating with foreigners. Plain Japanese is an adjusted form of Japanese that is easy to understand, even for beginners in the Japanese language, children, the elderly, etc. It is a short form using simple words, no honorific or humble forms, and native Japanese words instead of words derived from Chinese (e.g., 測る *hakaru* instead of 測定する *sokutei suru* for [measure].) (医療 x 「やさしい日本語」研究会, 2020).

#### The Need for Plain Japanese

In the Hanshin-Awaji Great Earthquake of 1995, 199 foreigners died, accounting for 3.09% of the total number of deaths. Compared with the proportion of foreign residents (1.8%) in the area,

the number was rather high. One of the reasons postulated for this is that it was difficult for foreigners to understand warnings about the disaster situation and evacuation (Sato, 2004). Since then, Plain Japanese has drawn greater attention with an emphasis on being easy-tounderstand. However, even after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, it was difficult for some foreigners to understand the phrase, "Takadai ni hinan shitekudasai", which means "Please evacuate to higher ground" (河北新報, 2011). For example, if they had been told the same thing in Plain Japanese, such as "Takaitokoro ni nigete" meaning, "Escape/run to a higher place," they might have saved themselves. With the frequent occurrence of natural disasters in Japan, Plain Japanese has attracted greater attention and has gradually become more widely propagated.

According to survey results from the Ministry of Justice in 2017 (Center for Human Rights Education and Awareness, 2017), more than 85% of foreigners residing in Japan are from countries where English is not their mother tongue, and only 40% of the respondents reported that they could communicate in English. Among the respondents, more than 80% answered that they could use Japanese at a level that does not cause problems in their daily lives. Based on these statistics, it is better to communicate with them in Plain Japanese.

### Activity Report on Plain Japanese in Medical Care

Yuko Takeda, a doctor and professor at Juntendo University, noticed this issue and founded a research group in 2019. Members of the group

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also include Kazunari Iwata, a professor at the University of the Sacred Heart and an expert in Japanese language education, Hirono Ishikawa, a professor at Teikyo University and an expert in health communication, and Midori Nii, a board member of Citizen's Network for Global Activities who has extensive experience in supporting foreigners in Japan. The author of this report joined the group in November 2020 as a project coordinator.

In the spring of 2020, the research group uploaded a video and scripts of Plain Japanese used in COVID-19 testing to support foreigners amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Afterward, on their homepage they posted downloadable materials and sample conversations using Plain Japanese for various situations, such as consultations, examinations, and the hospitalizations of foreign patients (https://easy-japanese.info/). In July 2021, a video in Plain Japanese about COVID-19 vaccinations was released (Juntendo University, 2021), and a leaflet (Appendix) summarizing the key points of Plain Japanese was published and is currently being distributed to various healthcare centers.

Online training sessions about Plain Japanese for medical personnel have also been conducted regularly since 2020. In the 2020 academic year, four workshops for 84 participants in total were held. During the training sessions, worksheets were provided for participants to practice paraphrasing medical terms and complex words. They then role-played with international students (as simulated patients) to simulate a medical professional-patient consultation with scenarios provided, to explain the diagnosis, treatment, or prescription in Plain Japanese. Finally, the international students gave feedback on what items medical professionals should rephrase for Japanese beginners.

Such activities are provided free of charge, and are funded by subsidies from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and private foundations.

#### **Multicultural Competency and Plain Japanese**

Plain Japanese is beneficial not only for nonnative speakers of Japanese but also for elderly Japanese people and people with disabilities or communication problems. It is also useful for healthcare interpreters and sign language interpreters on the job, because it is clearer and easier to understand, making it easier to convey the intended meaning in the target language.

However, there are also limitations with Plain Japanese. For example, one cannot paraphrase the names of diseases in Plain Japanese based on one's own understanding. We need to translate these into the target language correctly. Therefore, both the development of healthcare interpreters and the use of Plain Japanese play essential roles in providing multicultural medical care, as two sides of the same coin. Likewise, it is also essential for nursing educators to help students acquire both English proficiency and the skills to use Plain Japanese simultaneously, as well as to learn how to work with healthcare interpreters, as all of these factors are important in fostering multicultural competency.

The essence of multicultural nursing is to have as wide a range of interpersonal skills as possible and to develop the ability to approach the daily events that medical professionals face every day from various perspectives so that health professionals can benefit both their patients and themselves through successful communication. If medical professionals can use both Plain Japanese and English, and work with the assistance of healthcare interpreters, they can create a much more effective medical environment in which everyone feels that it is easy to receive medical care in today's multicultural and diverse society.

We believe, with the enhancement of English education and the broader use of Plain Japanese, receiving medical care will no longer be a barrier for foreigners in Japan.

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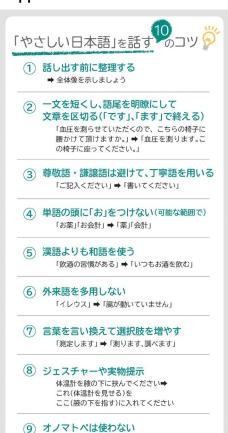
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相手からも必要な

情報を得やすく

します。

#### **Appendix**



「ガンガン」「チクチク」 ➡ なるべく使わない

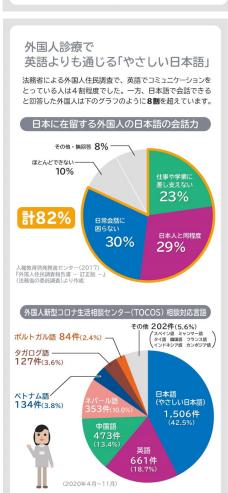
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日本人の高齢者への説明の時にも使えます。

解説:岩田一成 聖心女子大学現代教養学部・教授

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☆問診票(発熱外来用)・「オノマトペ」言い換えシートなど診療に 役立つ資料や教材を自由にダウンロードしてご活用いただけます

☆「やさしい日本語」研修会開催のお手伝いをします 研究会 HP の「お問い合わせ」よりご連絡ください

順天堂大学大学院医学研究科医学教育学・教授 武田裕子 (医療×「やさしい日本語」研究会 代表) 〒113-0033 東京都文京区本郷 2-8-3 天野ビル 101 TEL/FAX: 03-5802-1386

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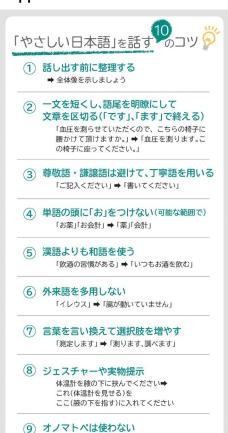
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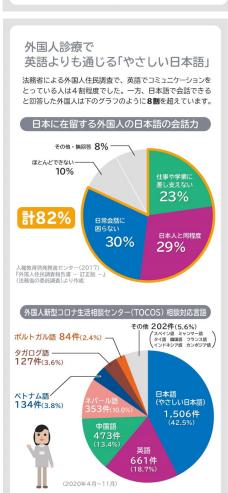
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