

Problems of Health Care Systems in Japan and the USA

John Ichiro Takayama, MD, MPH
Director, Department of Interdisciplinary Medicine
National Center for Child Health and Development
2-10-1 Okura, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo 157-8535, Japan

In Japan, 98-99% of the population has mandatory national health insurance. Although universal access may appear to be a panacea to problems related to health care delivery, health outcomes are also related to other aspects of health care. Compared to the U.S., only half the proportions of medical students choose pediatrics as their career. Residency training is geared towards subspecialism and resembles an apprenticeship model, resulting in tremendous variability in both duration and content of education.

Possibly related to this workforce as well as policy factors, health care appears to be intervention rather than prevention-based. The childhood immunization rate against measles is 10% lower in Japan compared to the U.S. and, last year, there were 100,000 cases with 100 deaths. Although more difficult to relate to outcomes, most children do not wear bicycle helmets and many automobile passengers do not use seat belts.