

Briefs

AGING AROUND THE WORLD

Growing Concern in Austria About Care of the Aging

Vienna is rapidly becoming a metropolis of the aged. Almost one-fourth of its population is over age 60 and their number is growing. Currently measured at 25% of the city's residents, the proportion of older persons is expected to reach almost 27% within the next 20 years. A similar increase in the number of older people in the rest of Austria—projected to move to 24% from the current 19%—means a growing demand for social services throughout the country. Estimates show that at least one-third of the older population will require services such as 'meals on wheels' if they are to continue living independently.

A special conference of the Austrian League of Cities in 1990 brought together some 200 participants from more than 80 communities to discuss these and other aging issues. Faced with the realization that more than 109,000 Austrians are over age 85 and that this number is expected to reach 150,000 in 20 years, the conference attendees concluded that social services will have to expand twelvefold to keep up with demand. They also emphasized the urgency of taking steps at all levels of government to cope with the country's rapidly aging population. (*Oesterrische Gemeinde Zeitung*, June 1991)

Aging in Japan Disproportionately Affects Rural Areas

By the year 2000 16% of Japan's population will be over 65. By 2020 this segment will reach 24%, one of the highest projected percentages in the world. According to news reports from Japan, these figures, which are well-known by now, mask an even more unsettling trend: rural aging.

In 1985, when the overall percentage of elderly in the population stood at 10%,

small towns in the countryside were supporting aging populations ranging from one-fifth to one-third of their total population. One town in Yamaguchi Prefecture recorded an elderly population of 35%. The projected figures suggest that early in the next century at least half the population of many rural towns will be over 65.

Rural areas are more susceptible to demographic shifts towards an elderly population as younger people opt for higher paying, higher status jobs in big cities.

The low birth rate (1.53 children per woman in 1990) and high life expectancy are among the prime factors in the graying of Japan. Currently Japan's life expectancy is the highest in the world—81.1 years for women, 75.86 years for men (1990).

Studies show that, at least financially, Japan's elderly are more than holding their own. A 1989 Ministry of Health study determined that the average annual income in the 60 to 70 age group amounted to ¥1.7 million (U.S. \$13,000), 6% above the national average. For people over 70 the average income dipped to ¥1.5 million (U.S. \$11,500), 11% below average, but still more than the minimum cost of living for a two person household (¥1.4 million).

The aging crisis is putting severe strains on the medical and caregiving system. At the governmental level, efforts directed at creating additional health care space are being accelerated. The Ministry of Health and Welfare continues to add to the 2,630 public day care centers for the elderly in Japan. In 1991 the Ministry requested a budget increase of more than 50% to ¥42 billion (U.S. \$320 million) for the construction and operation of these facilities. (*Look Japan*, January, 1992)

ALARM SYSTEMS

An Overview of Swiss Emergency Alarms

According to a national survey of the alarm systems available for Swiss older persons, there are presently six systems divided into two groups. The first of these work without telephone intervention (*Care Alarm*,

Multiguard Helper), using instead the electrical system to alert a neighbor, friend or relative in the vicinity of the residence from where the emergency call has originated. One of these devices (*Sanotron*), for example, triggers an emergency alarm via radio.

The second group operates via the telephone system with the user pushing a button to contact a round-the-clock emergency center (*Tele Alarm*, *Hasler-Ascom*, *Ericare*). It is clear that well-functioning emergency dispatch centers and neighborhood help systems are essential to the functioning of whichever alarm system is used. At the present time three regional centers each operating in one of Switzerland's three languages, have been certified by the Swiss Red Cross. (*Zeitlupe*)

Police Check-Up on Older Residents in Iowa

In Osage, Iowa, police have set up a computer system connected to the telephone lines of elderly subscribers. At the same time each day, the computer phones the subscriber and asks: "Good morning! Are you OK?" If the subscriber replies in the affirmative, the computer goes on to the next number on its list. If there is no reply, the computer alerts the police. The system has already saved several lives. (*Ainés*)

COMMUNITY CARE

Linked Service Centers Started in England

The Kent County Council is developing more than 30 "linked service centers" that provide a one-stop resource for services to the elderly in this British county. Each center will provide residential, respite and day care services, along with a base for home care services to support older persons in their own homes. The first four of more than 30 linked service centers in the county also work closely with local health authorities to provide physiotherapy and occupational therapy. **Molly de Courcy**, chair of the county social services committee, told representatives of

voluntary agencies at the launch of the centers that "carers will be able to ring into the centers for practical help and advice 24 hours a day." (*County Councils Gazette*, U.K., September 1991)

Tokyo Long-Term Plan Emphasizes Action

The current long-term plan for the Tokyo metropolis, which covers a ten-year period beginning in 1991, lists improving the status of the capital's elderly as one of four priority goals. The action plan calls specifically for the creation of community welfare mechanisms to "prevent elderly people from becoming bedridden, to enable citizens to continue to live in their local communities without anxiety, and to build a metropolis which meets the needs of the elderly and the disabled."

Among the projects in the plan are:

- Dispatching home helpers to assist all elderly or disabled persons who need special care and request the service. During the life of the plan, the number of households requiring this assistance is expected to rise to about 50,000 from about 21,000 at present.
- Improving short-term stay facilities at full service care institutions to about 4,000 beds from about 510 at present.
- Establishing about 650 home care service centers.
- Increasing the accommodation capacity of long-term care institutions to about 41,000 beds from just over 14,000 at present.

Training home helpers and expanding the supply of housing to ensure independent living for the elderly are other objectives of the action plan. (*Tokyo Municipal News*, Spring 1991)

DISABILITY

Housing for Disabled Promoted in Japan

The Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare is now offering subsidies to local governments and social welfare organizations for the construction of

apartments for the seriously handicapped. Hoping to foster greater independence among the handicapped, the Ministry wants each condominium-style building under the program to be staffed with a superintendent and several assistants to help care for the residents. Only a few apartments specially designed and designated for the elderly handicapped are available at present under the public housing program. (*Mainichi Daily*)

Low-Floor Buses and Elevators Planned for Tokyo Seniors

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government has started operating low-floor buses and installing elevators at subway stations to make life easier for the older persons and disabled. The new buses will have entrances and exits only about 55 cm. off the floor, compared to the present 84 to 91 cm. If the new buses win public approval, all 1,800 buses operating in the metropolitan area will eventually be replaced by the low-floor versions.

At the same time, subway elevators capable of carrying 11 wheelchair passengers and assistants will be installed at all 38 stations of the number 12 subway line now under construction. The entire line will be operational by 1997. Escalators at 49 of the 65 stations on three municipal subway lines are currently accessible to wheelchairs, but the narrow steps make it necessary for the wheelchair-bound persons to be accompanied. (*Mainichi Daily*)

Increased Access for Disabled in Kanagawa Prefecture

The Kanagawa Prefectural assembly has enacted legislation that will make existing and new public buildings accessible to the disabled. The Kanagawa building standards ordinance is the first such measure to be passed by a prefectural government. (Japan has 47 prefectures comparable to states or counties in other countries.)

The provisions of the bill apply to museums, libraries, hospitals, movie theaters, department stores and hotels. New buildings must have entryways at least 90 cm. wide, hallways at least 1.3 meters wide

and elevator doors at least 80 cm. wide in order to accommodate the wheelchair-bound. The ordinance also calls for buildings to be equipped with ramps. (*Japan Times*)

Swiss Travel Service for the Handicapped

A Swiss travel agency, whose proprietor is herself confined to a wheelchair, has launched a successful travel service for handicapped clients in Winterthur. Every destination is inspected for wheelchair access and personal services available for the handicapped traveler. A data bank has been started that lists hotels and services offering special facilities for the handicapped.

The agency also has a computer service for the deaf and hard of hearing who can transmit their needs and inquiries in writing via a modem connected to a phone.

The idea for the "Tamam" travel bureau (Tamam is Turkish for O.K.) was born on a trip to Turkey taken years ago by **Ursula Bois** and **Rene Moegeli**, who are the partners in the enterprise. (*Zeitlupe*)

HOUSING

Adapting Housing to Older Persons' Needs in Holland

Two housing corporations in the province of Limburg are renovating apartments to meet the needs of elderly tenants.

In Brunssum, an apartment building where 17% of the residents are age 55 and older (15% are under 25; 57% are ages 25 to 45; 11% are 45 to 55 years old), apartments are being adapted so that older persons can live in comfort and safety. In addition, the top floor of the building is being converted into a center for medical and social services that will include a physician, nurse, physiotherapist, pharmacy, meal program and hair salon. These services will be available to the broader community as well.

In another initiative to renovate existing housing for the needs of older persons, four of the seven floors in an apartment building in Hoensbroeck, in which half the residents

are age 55 and older, will be adapted for older occupants.

Both of these apartment projects have planned features that will meet the needs of older residents such as wider doorways, no thresholds, level floors and low-placed switches. Although the costs of such renovations are substantial, the long-term view is that ultimately the benefits of the sustained independence of older persons fostered by such adjusted housing will outweigh the initial costs. (*Leeftijd*)

Housing Adaptations Set for Japanese Elderly and Disabled

Because the Japanese government considers adapting existing houses to meet the special needs of older persons and disabled persons an urgent priority, the Ministry of Health and Welfare is launching a national demonstration in which several model houses in each of the country's 47 prefectures will be made user-friendly for them. After the modifications, the houses will be publicized through local government offices and a hotline counseling service.

Retrofitting funds will be made available to needy seniors. Part of the Ministry's Y8.1 billion (U.S.\$ 54 million) budget for health promotion activities will be earmarked for the housing demonstration project. (*Daily Yomiuri*)

INSTITUTIONAL CARE

Large Percent of Eastern German Old Age Homes Need Upgrading

The social welfare ministers of all 16 German states have asked the federal government to allocate a billion DM (U.S. \$600 million) annually between 1992 and 1996 for building and renewing homes for the aged and long-term care institutions in the five new states that formerly comprised the German Democratic Republic. According to the federal social affairs minister, approximately 40% of the 1,400 long-term care institutions in the five new states or Laender are urgently in need of an

overhaul. The minister told a political gathering last fall that substandard and, in part, inhuman conditions prevailed in a number of eastern long-term care institutions. The federal government has an obligation to assist the governments of the new Laender to overcome this situation. (*Altenhilfe*, KDA, December, 1991)

New Guidelines For Care of Japanese Elderly

The improvement of institutional care in Japan and the financial security of residents is the aim of new guidelines for the operation of privately operated homes for the elderly published in March 1991 by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. The new guidelines, which became effective in 1991, concern the building and management of these privately run facilities. They are designed to protect residents in case a home goes bankrupt. They make it impossible for private operators to set up new homes if their prospects for prolonged operation leave something to be desired.

The guidelines make it compulsory for home operators to provide income and expenditure projections for Ministry approval over a period of at least 30 years. The guidelines also provide for payments to residents of institutions that fail. Operators will have to secure an adequate number of future residents before a go-ahead is given for the construction of a new home. They will also have to obtain bank guarantees to ensure that prospective residents who have paid in advance will get their money back if a sufficient number of residents cannot be found to support construction of the home.

Other clauses provide a resident trial period, rules regarding the details of contracts with new residents, the division of homes into six categories and the compulsory public display of the home's category certificate. Homes that meet standards for services and facilities will earn a "silver mark" from the Ministry, indicating high quality.

According to a 1989 survey, the average payment required to move into one of the privately operated homes is Y22 million (U.S. \$172,000). The high one-time fee is justified because of the all-inclusive character of the services and amenities

provided. While there were 77 such luxury retirement homes in the country back in 1977, their number had increased to 155 by 1989, with about 12,000 residents making use of them. Recently, construction and finance companies have entered this lucrative market and now operate about a quarter of these homes. (*Mainichi Daily*, March 29, 1991)

Computers Personalize Care for Elderly in the U.K.

Computers are helping to "humanize" staff relations with clients in a residential home for the elderly in England's Durham County. The success of the project is likely to see its extension to other establishments in the county and elsewhere in the U.K. **Dwayne Johnson**, the manager of the facility, taught himself at home to use microcomputers and then developed an computerized care plans for all the residents in his Darlington facility, *Baydale Lodge*.

His individualized programs include an assessment of each resident's skills (for example, capabilities for personal care) and analysis of the client's social needs. Each program also builds up a life history from conversations with the resident. From this base, a care plan is devised.

"As far as I know," notes Johnson, "this is the only program of its kind, though others exist which contain elements of this package." Because residents are involved at every stage of the process, the information is ongoing and can be added to at any time to build up an ever more detailed picture of the client and his needs.

"The stereotypical idea that the computer age makes life impersonal has been turned on its head in this project because using the computer for structured discussions with the residents has actually resulted in a more detailed and meaningful communication between clients and staff."

The computer project has already brought about changes at Baydale. Each resident now is assigned a key member of the staff who is responsible for monitoring and helping to carry out the individual care plan. The staff member tends to develop a closer relationship with the resident. The creation of an activities center separated from the quiet lounge area is one of the

changes already brought about at Baydale as a result of interviews with residents. (*County Council Gazette*, September, 1991)

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Most Japanese Elderly On Welfare Live Alone

A survey by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government has determined that about 76% of Tokyo welfare recipients age 65 or over live alone. This represents an increase of almost 10% since 1985. The survey also found that a little over 90% of women age 75 to 79 on welfare live by themselves. The survey covered 770 welfare recipients age 65 or over. (*Japan Times*, July 26, 1991)

Single-Person Households Increasing Among German Seniors

The number of single-person households among older Germans increases with age. Almost 21% of people age 60 to 65 live alone; in the 65 to 70 age category this figure reaches 47%. According to government projections, the number of single person households will continue to increase—particularly among women. Only 16% of men above 65 now live alone, whereas for women this figure reaches 53%. More than 80% of women above 75 live in single person households. (*Altenheim*)

Vienna Tries New Option For Senior Lifestyle

Vienna's first six cooperative apartments for unrelated groups of seniors were launched by the city administration in 1990 and, at first report, are proving successful. Social workers introduced and matched the groups in a series of meetings and discussions that gave participants—single seniors on welfare living in old age homes—an opportunity to get to know one another. The participants in the test program are well enough for independent living but had been placed in long-term care institutions due to earlier illnesses. They

stayed on because they had neither funds nor families to support independent living.

Under the new concept for "living together, the tenants of the cooperative apartment are charged 20% of their old age pensions for rent in the city-owned apartments, each of which has a private bedroom for each resident that is furnished by the individual. The kitchen and living room is furnished by the city. A social worker visits once a month, more frequently if necessary, to act as a troubleshooter. (*Renter and Pensionist*, November, 1991)

LONGEVITY

Japan Has 3,625 Centenarians

Japanese women hold the first ten spots on the list of the 3,625 longest-lived people in Japan all of whom have passed their 100th birthday. **Waka Shirihama** of Mirakonojo is 113 while the oldest man, **Gihei Oka**, 108 is 11th on the list. Of the 3,625 centenarians, 70% are women. The list was released as is customary every year on *Respect for the Aged Day*, which was celebrated on September 8.

Okinawa, Japan's southernmost prefecture, topped the list of the aged with almost 15 centenarians per 100,000 population, about five times higher than the national average. **Hiroshi Shibata**, health research chief of the *Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology* says the Okinawans' unique diet and lifestyle account for their longevity. Okinawans eat more vegetables and seaweed and the island's warm climate allows people to be active outside all year round. Shibata predicted the average life expectancy of Japanese will continue to increase but not much beyond 113. (*Daily Yomiuri*, September 11, 1991)

Swedish Survey Shows Socially Isolated Older Men Have Higher Death Rate

A survey conducted in Sweden reveals a higher death rate for older men with weak social networks than for socially-integrated men of the same age.

Eighty-one percent of the men living in the city of Malmö and born in 1914 were surveyed. During the interval between the initial survey and the follow-up—1982 to 1987—13% of the participants had died. The researchers found that men living alone, with poor access to emotional support, and dissatisfied with their level of social participation had a death rate 2 to 2.5 times higher than those who did not characterize their lives in this way.

The researchers also determined that the connection between death rate and social isolation was independent of risk factors such as smoking, drinking and high blood pressure. Nor could the discrepancy between the groups be attributed to the men's state of health at the beginning of survey period, according to **Bertil S. Hanson**. (*Trygd og Arbeid and Aldring & Eldre*)

TECHNOLOGY

Home Medical System Under Development in Japan

The development of a home-based medical monitoring system based on monitoring patients via interactive cable television has been commissioned by Japan's Ministry of Health and Welfare. The system will be used to treat chronically ill patients, including the elderly, in areas underserved by hospitals. A two-way TV monitoring system will be the core of the service. Vital sign sensors will transmit a patient's heart rate, blood pressure and other data over telephone lines to a monitoring center located in a hospital. Daily "house calls" will be made by doctors over the interactive TV system. Ministry officials said that, if system development lives up to expectations, up to 300,000 patients will benefit. The Ministry has commissioned the *Medical Information System Development Center* to do the preparatory work for the project including developing the required medical hardware. (*Daily Yomiuri*, February 23, 1991)