

種稲 憲太郎氏 (特別養護老人ホーム きしろ荘 施設長)

Kentaro TANEINE, Director, Special Elderly Nursing Home 'Kishiro-so'

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Hello everybody. My name is Kentaro Taneine and I am the Director of the Special Elderly Nursing Home Kishiro-so, which is located in Kobe City's Nada Ward.

Today I would like to talk to you on the theme of animal-assisted activities in special elderly nursing homes.

To accompany today's talk, I have prepared some photographs that show how these activities take place inside the nursing home facilities. These photos don't match the details of the talk, but please take a look at them while you are listening.

First, I will explain about the Kishiro-so facility.

These days, there are many kinds of facility that our senior citizens can enter. Kishiro-so is what is known as a 'special elderly nursing home'. It is a live-in facility for people with dementia, those who are bedridden, and those who are in need of other kinds of support in order to live their daily lives. At present, there are 50 residents living at this home. Kishiro-so began operating on May 21, 1979 so this year is the 33rd year since its foundation.

Next, I will explain about the animal-assisted activities carried out at Kishiro-so. Here, we refer to the animal-assisted activities as animal visits. The animals' visiting day is the third Wednesday of every month. These animal visits began in July 1992 so the activities have been continuing for 20 years now. The photograph here shows a scene of these activities. Dr. Kaori Murata, a veterinarian who works at the Mominoki Animal Clinic in Kobe's Nada Ward, the same ward as Kishiro-so, has played a central role in progress of the animal visits. About 20 years ago, Dr. Murata began these activities by bringing along a single dog with her. At that time, a lot of people were against the idea because

they thought bringing dogs into facilities for the elderly was a bad practice from the standpoint of hygiene. In view of this opposition, Dr. Murata selected Kishiro-so as she thought it would be easier to get permission to enter a facility that had a female director.

At the time, the director of Kishiro-so happened to be a woman, and she loved animals so much that she used to bring her own Chin (Japanese Spaniel) dog called Yuinosuke with her to work every day. Also, there were other staff members working at the facility who had a tolerant view of animals. For example, one person central to running Kishiro-so also kept a dog that had been injured in an accident at the facility. So I understand that animal-assisted activities started at Kishiro-so without any major problems.

At the time when these activities were starting at Kishiro-so I was not yet working there. However I have retained the impressions I had of the facility activities when I did start working there. So next I would like to introduce two of the things related to the activities that I remember from that time.

Unfortunately I do not have a photograph of her but first I would like to tell you about a woman who I will refer to as H-san. This woman had no children and no contact with her relatives. My memory of her may be unclear in some respects, but when one of the female dogs who came on the animal visits had some puppies, I remember that H-san named one of the puppies Peko-chan. When Peko-chan also began taking part in the activities, H-san began to look forward to the monthly visits of the dog she herself had named.

Regarding terminal care at Kishiro-so, our policy is to take care of our residents until the end of their lives in as natural a way as possible provided that this is in keeping with the wishes of the residents and their

families. H-san was old and in poor health, and she had no family, so it was decided that Kishiro-so would take care of her until the end of her life.

When residents reach the stage of having a terminal condition we take care of them until their final day while giving them the opportunity of eating their favorite foods, listening to their favorite music, decorating their room with their favorite flowers, etc. In the case of this resident, one of the things she most liked was meeting her favorite animal, Peko-chan. When H-san's condition became serious, Peko-chan and the owner visited her frequently beyond their usual monthly visiting day. I remember that Peko-chan and owner attended H-san's funeral as well. For H-san, who had no family or relatives, I think the presence of Peko-chan, who made visits especially to see her, must have been extremely meaningful. This is why this story stands out in my memory.

Another resident I would like to talk to you about is a woman I will call N-san. She was afflicted with progressive supranuclear palsy, which is a difficult medical term referring to a form of chronic paralysis. Among the characteristic symptoms of this illness are a narrowing field of vision and stiffening of the joints so that the sufferer eventually becomes unable to move. Also, in the later stages, the swallowing function becomes weaker and the sufferer becomes unable to talk. However, people with this illness do retain clear awareness up until the end. N-san was particularly fond of animals so she took part in the animal visit sessions every month. When she was first admitted to Kishiro-so, she was still able to move her body to some extent. When a dog came up to her, she tried her best to move her rigid body and stretch out her hand toward the dog, and this was very impressive to witness. But she was suffering from a progressive disease, and gradually she found it harder and harder to move, and toward the end she was bedridden.

In the course of animal-assisted activities a dog owner visited N-san even though she was bedridden. Since N-san had to stay in bed the whole day, she couldn't take part in the club activities. But because she liked

animals, she joined AAA and a dog would come up and sit on her bed. Usually, as her joints were stiff, when we gave her support with going to the toilet or changing her clothes, we had a hard time. But if we took a little dog in and let it up onto her bed, after a short while her body would relax and she could bend her outstretched arms a little more than usual. Of course, when we provided toilet and dressing support, we would call to her and slowly move her body, but it was still difficult to do. So I think that, all in all, the dog had the power to ease N-san's tension. It is for this reason that N-san's case stands out in my memory.

I believe that conducting these animal-assisted activities is producing a variety of beneficial effects at many kinds of facilities. One thing, as was mentioned earlier, is that people have to come and live in these facilities for various reasons, and in so-doing they often have to part with animals they were keeping. Of course, when facing this move, some people often say that if they can't take the animal with them they will refuse to go into the facility. So, for this reason, some residents have been permitted to join the facility together with the dog or cat they had been keeping at home. It was not that Kishiro-so officially announced a policy that residents could keep their own pets; it was just that things turned out that way. But even so, I think it was because Kishiro-so accepted animal-assisted activities that such a thing became possible.

Later, in the course of accommodating these residents, our staff also began to develop an interest in animal-assisted activities. Study meetings were held at the facility on this theme with Dr. Murata providing



instruction. This was the catalyst for a dog being kept at the facility. This is a photo of that dog, a male Shih Tzu called Chaashuu. Chaashuu had been a regular participant in the animal visits for a long time and was used to being with people. When time allowed, I took him around the residents' dining room and also into some of the residents' own rooms, and many of the residents looked forward to this contact with Chaashuu. However, it seemed that Chaashuu himself enjoyed being given presents more than anything, and he liked meeting the young female volunteers more than he enjoyed contact with the residents.

Actually Chaashuu died in September last year and, as he was so well loved by everybody including facility staff, residents, visiting tradespeople and other visitors, there was a continuing atmosphere of sadness for many days afterwards. About a month after he died, a relative of one of the residents who was concerned about what we would do now that Chaashuu was gone, introduced us to a homeless dog that the police had taken into their care. This was a pug named Kuro, and we began keeping Kuro at our facility from October of last year. We don't know where this dog originally came from. Possibly he was abandoned. But he had no name, so we chose the name Kuro which we thought would be easy for the residents to remember.

At the beginning Kuro was a quiet dog that did not bark or yelp. However recently he has started to become excited and yelp loudly whenever visitors come. So now we are consulting with Dr. Murata on what to do about this in future. But since Kuro has already started living with us in Kishiro-so I hope he will be able to visit the residents and give them some comfort and peace of mind in the same way as Chaashuu did.

Now I would like to talk about the animal-assisted activities themselves.

In the past, special elderly nursing homes in general accommodated many lively residents as well as many who, although they may have used a wheelchair, were clearheaded and not suffering from dementia. But over the last five years, the general condition of residents

has been growing steadily more severe. This has also been true at Kishiro-so - the number of residents with more severe conditions is increasing. So while in the past there were many residents who looked forward to the monthly animal visits, or who waited expectantly for the chance to meet their favorite animal, in recent years it has become more difficult for many residents to do even this. However, even though people with dementia have poorly functioning memories, their sensibilities do remain steady. So they are able to clearly understand what is happening in a given situation. Accordingly, we are changing our AAA practices to focus on this aspect.

Kishiro-so has a policy of taking appropriate care of our residents while placing importance on the life they have led previous to their arrival. So when a new resident comes to live at Kishiro-so, we ask them and their family members to tell us as much as they can about their life history. Since the facility is carrying out these animal visit activities, among the questions we ask are whether the resident has kept any animals and whether they like animals or not. If the resident likes animals, we encourage them to take part in the animal visit activities every month. These visits are only once a month and the length of the visits is also short. So recently many of the residents taking part tend to forget even those animals they met during previous visits. But even so, thanks to the stimulation they receive from the animals, the residents can remember the good old days and talk about them, even if only for a short time. Also, they can communicate with the animals in a calm atmosphere. Accordingly, we want to continue with these animal visit activities while placing emphasis on these positive points.

Lastly, I would like to say thank you to the people who bring their animals along to visit these facilities. There are two things that really impress me when I see them at work. One concerns the animals. When they visit the facility, these animals interact with the residents in a very calm manner despite the fact that many of the residents find it difficult to communicate using words due to the progression of their dementia, etc. My feeling is that this is because the animals receive plenty of affection from their owners everyday, and

also because even though they can't speak they are emotionally accessible to the residents.

Another thing is that the owners of the animals are also very adept when addressing the residents and in making contact with them. In nursing care work, communication is very important but it is easy to become carelessly entrenched in words alone and devote all our efforts toward understanding the residents verbally. But in nursing care work it is also very important to grasp the feelings of each resident that they cannot put into words. The people who visit the facility with their animals are experienced in communicating non-verbally with these animals on a daily basis, and they engage in this communication by making use of their feelings and sensitivity. For this reason, these owners are very adept at involving the residents in the activities, and I find that quite impressive.

Since many of the residents who receive the animal visits are now in a severe condition, the amount of time they can spend in contact with the animals is quite short. But even so, this time for remembering the good old days and enjoying contact with animals is very precious. My staff and I are very thankful that we too can share these precious moments with the animals, the animals' owners and the residents. Thank you very much for listening.