

Preface

Editor-in-chief, Hideki Hashimoto

The editorial committee of the Japanese Journal of Health Economics and Policy is pleased to bring the E3 (English version) to a global audience. This volume includes three papers that deal with one of the most critical yet debate-provoking issues in ageing societies: how to provide a sustainable healthcare system under population ageing. Japan is at the frontline of this demographic change. The national government has announced a new policy for a “community integrated care system,” which aims to seamlessly combine primary care, acute care, and long-term care to ensure performance efficiency in terms of improved quality and lower cost. However, empirical evidence to support the design of a suitable administrative framework is limited, as is research on economic incentives for providers and consumers, and the facilitation of social infrastructure. No single country can face this challenge effectively, and multi-country collaboration is required.

Early versions of the papers in this volume were originally presented at an international symposium titled “Managing Integration of Long Term Care for Elderly and Policy Implication”, held in Tokyo on September 29th, 2014, by Seijo University as part of its 100th Anniversary project. The symposium concluded a 5-year academic research project on the issue led by Prof. Hiroyuki Kawaguchi at the School of Economics, Seijo University, with financial support from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A) #23243039).

The first paper, presented by Prof. Kawaguchi and Prof. Peter Smith, focused on “the role of primary health care in incentivizing policy outcomes” to extract lessons from the UK experience. The paper empirically evaluated two policies which aimed to provide incentives to improving system efficiency: fundholding budgets and pay-for-performance in the UK primary care. The authors argued that primary care is a promising means of ensuring system sustainability in an ageing society, although they also concluded that the design of financial incentives should be done with caution, and that further empirical evidence is required.

The second paper, “Kotitori: the service integrator model for home care” by Prof. Lillrank from Aalto University, Finland, provided the theoretical framework for a community-integrated system to sustain homecare, as well as a case analysis of the Kotitori experiment conducted in Tempere, Finland. Koti means “home” and Tori means “market” in Finnish. The framework of Kotitori represents a unique governance structure - called a “Vendor Management Organization” - which links public principal and private providers so that they can serve local patients in an efficient and coherent manner. The paper argued that the Kotitori experiment represented a promising case of administrative and organizational innovation aimed at achieving the integration of care in the community.

The last paper was “Long-term care in the Netherlands: towards managed competition?” by Prof. van Kleef from Erasmus University Rotterdam, with Prof. Kawaguchi as a co-author. The Netherlands government first introduced managed competition into the health insurance scheme in 2006. The paper focused on the further question of whether managed competition is applicable to long-term care. The paper found that a managed care scheme did succeed in slowing healthcare spending growth in acute care, but only under the preconditions of risk-equalization and information transparency to aid consumers’ choice. The paper concluded that it is less likely that long-term care could meet the conditions, and that careful discussion and assessment are necessary to avoid cost containment at the cost of quality.

We hope that these three papers in this volume will provide a firm platform on which a wider range of scholars and policy makers can explore the integration of healthcare to meet the needs of an ageing society. Finally, the editorial board expresses its sincere appreciation to Chancellor and Prof. Yuji Yui of Seijo Gakuen School for his generosity in allow these papers to be shared in this volume. We extend our acknowledgement to researchers that joined the symposium for their useful comments; Prof. Eiji Tajika, Dr. Jun Kikuchi, Prof. Masako Ii, Prof. Michiko Moriyama, and Prof. Hiroya Ogata. We also express our deepest appreciation to Prof. Kawaguchi for his considerable time and effort in preparing these papers for publication.