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Report on the “Maintenance of Mobility in Individuals with Thalidomide Embryopathy”  
Symposium in Hamburg

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I hereby report on the symposium, “Maintenance of Mobility in Individuals with Thalidomide Embryopathy,” which was held in Hamburg, Germany, on 23-24 September 2017. I have just recently begun participating in the research group on Thalidomide Embryopathy (TE), named “The research group on ascertaining the health and living status and the creation of a support infrastructure for thalidomide-impaired individuals in Japan” from April 2017, so I have had very limited experience seeing TE patients; however, as I serve as a rehabilitation doctor in the research group, the theme of this symposium was very attractive and I went to Hamburg to obtain information.

“Mobility” is a term that means “ease of movement” or “ability to move freely.” So the theme may mean maintaining the ability to move freely in TE patients. The subtitle was “Prevention, Pain Therapy and Alternative Therapeutic Procedures.” This symposium was held by Dr. Rudolf Byers, a German physician who has been working with TE patients not only in Germany but throughout Europe (Photo 1). Many TE patients, medical doctors, and rehabilitation professionals attended the symposium (Photo 2 and 3), and the number of attendees on the first day was 230, including 200 TE patients from all over Europe. Several patients with lower limb deficiencies as well as upper limb deficiencies attended using wheelchairs.

The content of this symposium was diverse, including content not directly related to mobility. Lectures and practice on the maintenance of mobility (including prevention of cardiovascular diseases), control of pain, coping with stress, and the use of alternative medicine were conducted. Similar to Japanese patients, many European TE patients complain of pain in the trunk and extremities as they age, and they were eager to listen and ask questions to the lecturers. In the symposium room, tools useful in daily activities (Photo 4) and new types of wheelchairs (Photo 5) were displayed.

What I learned from this symposium may not be immediately applicable to Japanese patients, as there exist differences in insurance systems and so on; however, I have found that the current problems facing TE patients in Europe and Japan are similar, and I feel the information from this symposium will be useful for future activities in our research group.



Photo 1: Rudolf Beyer and author



Photo 2: Symposium venue (1)



Photo 3: Symposium venue (2)



Photo3: Exhibition of tools useful for living

The red one nearest is a ballpoint pen that is easy to hold for individuals with disabilities



Photo 5: Exhibition of wheelchairs

The wheelchair in the middle can be used on the sandy ground