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Japan's Medical Pioneers with International Appeal

Leading Japanese health provider Kaikoukai Healthcare Group is working to welcome more medical tourists from around the world.

Hirohisa Kawahara
Chairperson
Kaikoukai Healthcare Group



Japanese medical firm Kaikoukai Healthcare Group was first launched in 1979 with just one hospital and 40 staff. Now, 45 years later, the company has expanded to include a wide range of services and 40 different facilities across Japan, employing approximately 2,500 people and treating a growing number of patients from all over the world. The group welcomes overseas clients and travelers for checkups, tests and procedures and is keen to build on its global reputation. With medical tourism, where patients travel abroad for healthcare treatment, on the rise, the firm has been working hard to increase its share of the booming market, projected to grow from \$24.1 billion in 2023 to \$93.4 billion by 2030. In addition to hospitals, the firm operates diagnostic imaging, dialysis and nursing care facilities while pioneering new medical technology in Japan. Focusing on advanced medical care is a priority throughout the firm. Kaikoukai was the first organization in Japan to introduce PET-CT (Positron Emission Tomography-Computed Tomography) scans, and it boasts some of the country's most comprehensive test results interpreted by experienced teams of physicians. Its advanced medical care teams are particularly concerned with detecting and treating serious conditions, including cancer, heart disease and dementia, among others. Examples include FDG-PET (Fluorodeoxyglucose) diagnostic tech-

nology, which is crucial in discovering systemic cancers. Amyloid PET and SPECT (Single-Photon Emission Computed Tomography) scans can more accurately identify types of dementia. FUS (Focused Ultrasound) makes it possible to treat hand tremors using ultrasound without radiation or surgery. Other examples are scanning ammonia PET for early detection of asymptomatic ischemic heart disease, and advanced technology SPECT for early detection of the rare and recently discovered disease TGCV (Triglyceride deposit cardiomyopathy). Dr. Hirohisa Kawahara, chairperson of Kaikoukai Healthcare Group, believes that the firm's success and growth are not determined by the technical specifications of its medical devices, but by the quality of the facilities and the staff operating them. "The top priorities for patients are safety or satisfaction," said Kawahara. These standards have also strengthened the group's international reputation for excellence. Although the quality of medical care in Japan is among the highest in the world, its medical tourism business falls short of leading nations such as the U.S. or Singapore. However, this may be about to change, with Kaikoukai poised to play a significant role. In Aichi Prefecture, where the group is based, government and healthcare institutions are working together to promote their services and facilities to overseas patients to take advantage of the medical tourism

surge. The firm is helping lead the way thanks to its significant experience with patients arriving from nations such as China in recent years. While the number of Kaikoukai's foreign patients were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, they are now growing again and are expected to continue to rise, supported by Chubu Central International Airport's direct links to Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand. The company's work in this field is delivered by a dedicated team offering a full suite of services, including assistance with appointments, and interpreters speaking English, Chinese, Indonesian, Spanish and Portuguese. Kaikoukai hopes to attract more patients from different countries as the trend continues. "Even before the pandemic, there was growth in medical tourism in Japan, but unfortunately, the Japanese system was not internationalized enough to welcome those patients. We set up a department to internationalize our medicine and try to market our services with hotels, letting them know we provide advanced care. Multilingualism is also important," said Kawahara. Kaikoukai plans to grow its medical tourism business by aiming to offer the highest-quality care in the finest environment—for the most optimal patient outcomes and customer satisfaction. The results so far have been overwhelmingly positive, with favorable feedback, returning patients and regular referrals from overseas. Kawahara said the group believes that healthcare should be borderless and wants to help anyone in need of care. "There are still many people who are not satisfied with medical care in their own countries but who cannot find the right information about medical care in Japan. We want as many patients as possible to access Japanese medical care," said Kawahara.



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