

About the Discoverer of Hashimoto's Disease

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Dr. Hakaru Hashimoto

Introduction

There are many diseases or syndromes designated by a personal name. In the Textbook of Internal Medicine, there are a few hundred names of doctors who discovered diseases that are named for them. Of these, Hashimoto's thyroiditis stands out as a prominent one. Hashimoto's disease is a very common illness of the thyroid gland; however, surprisingly little is known about its discoverer, Hakaru Hashimoto. Dr. Hakaru Hashimoto, a graduate of Medical School of Kyushu Imperial University, was the first to describe the chronic thyroid disorder with diffuse lymphocytic infiltration, fibrosis and

parenchymal atrophy. He termed it as "Struma Lymphomatosa", which is now referred as Chronic thyroiditis or "Hashimoto's disease". As a mark of respect for Dr. Hakaru Hashimoto, his picture is used in the logo of the Japan Thyroid Association.

The Life of Hakaru Hashimoto

Hakaru Hashimoto was born to a family of medical practitioners in the village of Midau, Nishi-tsuge in the Mie prefecture, Iga-Ueno on May 5, 1881. His family had practiced medicine for generations. He was the third son of his parents.

After spending his childhood in his birthplace, Hakaru left his house to enter the First mie prefectural junior High School at Tsu. It was about this time when Hakaru started thinking of pursuing medicine. the medical profession was one of the well respected professions in those days and many children were inspired to pursue medicine. Many of his classmates also became very active in the medical field. As for Hakaru, he was greatly influenced by his grandfather, Gen'i Hashimoto, a well-known doctor in that region who had studied Dutch medicine at the end of the Edo Era.

Interested to study medicine, Hakaru advanced to the third National High School at Kyoto under the old school system and on to the department of Medicine at Kyusyu Imperial University. He enered the department of Medicine at Kyusyu Imperial University in Fukuoka in1903.

Kyushu Imperial University was founded originally as Fukuoka Medical College of Kyoto Imperial

University that same year. In 1910, the college became Kyushu Imperial University. In 1907 he was one of the first graduates of the new medical school at Kyushu University in Fukuoka, and from 1908 to 1912 worked in the surgical department with professor Hayari Miyake. During this period, Hakaru Hashimoto examined the thyroid tissues removed from four patients of middle-aged women and discovered new pathological characteristics never reported before.

He reported his findings as an independent new disease in *Archiv Fur Klinische Chirurgie*, the German Journal of clinical surgery in 1912 at the age of 31. This report marked the discovery of Hashimoto's disease.* It was not until Dr. Hashimoto died that Hashimoto's disease had become recognized among western medical community. Even in Japan his accomplishment became popular in medical community in late 1950s.

Soon after the publication of this paper, Hakaru Hashimoto went to Europe. He spent three years in London, Berlin and Göttingen. Finally he stayed in Germany and studied pathology under Prof. Kaufman at Goettingen University. However, within two years, World War 1 broke out and Hakaru was forced to return to Japan without accomplishing his purpose. Upon his return, he returned to his alma mater for a short period. But soon he decided to take over the family practice in his hometown. He was 35 years old when Hakaru started practicing medicine.

It quickly became known throughout the countryside that a doctor, a graduate of the Imperial University who had studied abroad, had begun practicing medicine. Surgery was the main field in his hospital. But he treated all patients equally regardless of their status. Riding in the hospital's rickshaw, he traveled great distances across the mountains and fields to visit patients.

Footnotes

*He also found that this pathology resembled sialadenitis called Mikulicz's disease found by Prof. Mikulicz which now is thought to be identical or similar to Sjogren's syndrome. Dr. Miyake studied surgical procedures under Prof. Mikulicz in Germany. Chronic thyroiditis and saialadenitis are now regarded as autoimmune diseases. You can trace Dr. Hashimoto's accomplishment to Prof. Mikulicz through Prof. Miyake.

Four years after he opened his practice, he got married at thirty-nine. He had three sons and one daughter.

Suddenly at age 52, he was infected with typhoid fever on one of his house calls. He died suddenly on January 9, 1934. He died before he received the recognition for discovering Hashimoto's disease. Hakaru was a man who sincerely loved and cared for his patients. His pursuit of knowledge was marked by continuous effort and diligence.

Conclusion

The discovery of Hashimoto's disease was a significant step in the history of the discovery of abnormal autoimmunity and endocrine disorders. Mild cases of Hashimoto's disease have been found to exist in one of 30 adult women in the general population. However, the root cause of the disease has yet to be decided. That is a giant task, but it is among the most important current goals in modern medicine.

Acknowledgements

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