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Japan's Mandate Against the Metabolic Syndrome: How to Win the Fight Against Fat

By Carol Eisner

PROMINENT AMERICAN DOCTOR AND BUSINESSMAN ADDRESSES JAPANESE MANDATE TO PREVENT DIABETES AND OFFERS VISIONARY SOLUTION

"Japan is the first country in the world to mandate that all adults who need it receive individualized lifestyle counseling to prevent diabetes. This is a remarkable step for a government to take, but as world-wide obesity and diabetes epidemics continue to worsen, measures like this will have to become more common. DPS has created the gold standard in on-line coaching. Our system helps people adopt and sustain weight loss strategies in an efficient and cost-effective program."

-- Neal Kaufman, M.D., M.P.H., and Founder and CEO, Diabetes Prevention Source, LLC

Japan is a country known for its trim waistlines, but according to the World Health Organization about 7 million Japanese have type 2 diabetes and by the year 2030 that number could possibly double, unless significant steps are taken to stem the tide (Wild, et. al., *Global Prevalence of Diabetes*. Diabetes Care 27:1047–1053, 2004). As the spread of Western lifestyles gives rise to an increased rate of obesity, type 2 diabetes has become a threat to the Japanese economy, work force and productivity. Japan's challenge is how to handle the overwhelming number of individuals who need guidance in order to prevent catastrophic illnesses and devastating economic consequences – as well as the human toll this disease will take. DPS's state-of-the-art application, based on the NIH proven Diabetes Prevention Program, is ready to be adapted for Japan and will bring to scale a proven approach to preventing diabetes in high-risk people.

Enacted in July 2006 to become law in 2008, the Japanese Mandate from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare is an imperative stating that all people between 40 – 74 years of age must be screened for the metabolic syndrome, a combination of medical disorders that increases one's risk for cardiovascular disease and diabetes. This mandatory screening will come at great expense, but if high-risk individuals can be identified early, an intervention now can save money down the road.

"This is a much bigger problem than most realize," states Neal Kaufman, M.D., M.P.H., founder and CEO of the California-based Diabetes Prevention Source ([DPS](http://www.dpshealth.com)), a company that creates innovative online coaching software designed to help people adopt and sustain healthy habits, prevent chronic conditions and weight related illnesses. "The direct and indirect costs of weight related complications, such as kidney failure, blindness, amputation and loss of productivity are enough to bankrupt countries large and small, developing or developed."

According to the International Diabetes Federation, diabetes currently affects 246 million people worldwide and is expected to affect 380 million by 2025 (Source: Diabetes Atlas, third edition © International Diabetes Federation, 2006). According to Yoshitomo Oka, president of the Japan Diabetes Society, "there will be need for cutting-edge bioscience as well as new diabetes care and treatment strategies."
(<http://www2.convention.co.jp/jds50/en/greetings.html/>)

In May of this year, by invitation of the Japanese Diabetes Society, Kaufman traveled with representatives from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) to Sendai, Japan to demonstrate DPS' software to physicians and scientist at the Society's annual meeting. While in Japan, he also met with an impressive and diverse group of business leaders, health experts, physicians, disease management companies, venture capitalists, and others interested in preventing diabetes. Kaufman told them what they already knew and dreaded: if current lifestyle habits remain unchanged, millions of Japanese will get diabetes. Today, forty percent of Japanese adults have pre-diabetes

and require aggressive interventions with a doctor, nurse, dietician, or diabetes educator in order to prevent dire complications of the disease such as amputation, kidney failure, blindness and heart disease, and more.

While in Japan, Dr. Kaufman demonstrated the UPMC *Virtual Lifestyle Management* diabetes prevention program, a system built on DPS' Behavior Change Suite™, a state-of-the-art internet based monitoring and coaching platform. This technology can be customized to power any lifestyle intervention through personalized education, motivation promotion, activity planning and daily tracking.

“Japan has over 10,000 experts in diabetes and prevention -- yet, no one has been successful in stemming the tide of the diabetes epidemic. DPS technology will help solve the problem of delivering care, treatment and prevention on the scale and at the price needed in Japan” Kaufman told a rapt audience of potential partners as he demonstrated DPS software.

Using this cutting edge software, DPS also created its Physical Activity Prescription™ (PARx), an online service that gives healthcare providers tools to help patients become more active. The DPS Behavior Change Suite™, the platform that powers the PARx, can power interventions by healthcare providers, disease management organizations, medical care systems, or any other organization that values helping individuals become healthier.

Dr. Kaufman is a prominent leader in California's public health arena and an advisor to government leaders and legislators. Kaufman warns that diabetes “goes beyond the direct costs of medical treatments. There are lost workdays, permanent disability, and premature death.” Direct medical costs and indirect expenditures are estimated to be over \$300 billion worldwide, and this will continue to rise unless significant changes are made. (Source: [Diabetes Atlas](#), third edition © International Diabetes Federation, 2006).

The combination of the Japanese mandate, along with existing business relationships in Japan, got Kaufman's public health wheels turning. As a leader in local, state and national efforts in the U.S. to improve the health of communities, Kaufman sees that Japan is a country that could take advantage of DPS' expertise in facilitating healthy behavior changes through cost-effective prevention. “This is a perfect opportunity to marry our state-of-the-art Internet technology with approaches that have been proven to help individuals adopt and sustain healthy lifestyles. The tools we have developed can make this groundbreaking mandate a reality,” says Kaufman.

Dr. Kaufman spent 30 years working as a physician and public health advocate, as well as a professor of pediatrics and public health at the UCLA Schools of Medicine and co-director of the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities. His wife and co-founder of DPS, Francine Kaufman, M.D., heads the Center for Diabetes, Endocrinology and Metabolism at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles, is past president of the American Diabetes Association, a board member of the International Diabetes Federation and author of the acclaimed book [Diabesity](#) published by Bantam Books, a major U.S. publisher owned by Random House.

“Our family lives and breathes the diabetes epidemic in our professional lives,” says Neal Kaufman. “We created this company to help at risk individuals and reduce the burden of diabetes on society.”

What intrigued Kaufman was how this mandate will, in fact, be implemented and how these “lifestyle” diseases can be reversed and prevented at a bearable cost to the nation. Kaufman says that just encouraging personal responsibility and healthy behaviors has proven to be ineffective, but giving someone the tools and support needed allows them to stay motivated and has been proven successful over and over again. “Disease prevention must be economically worthwhile in terms of what is achieved for the amount of money spent. An individual's personal health can be enhanced with a variety of effective behavior change approaches,” says Kaufman. “Being more physically active and eating better can become permanent habits, promoting long-term health and well-being.”

“Japanese leaders of major companies are interested in a thirty-year horizon,” says Kaufman. “They are a people interested in history but even more, they are dedicated to the future, and to creating a healthy Japan for the next generation. And with DPS, that healthy future can be a reality.”