



The Lion Dental Center,
opened in 1927

Chapter 2

Contributing to the development of dental treatments

Dental treatment activities

In addition to promoting oral hygiene through such initiatives as the Lion Lecture Meetings, Kobayashi was committed to dental treatment, establishing Japan's first dental clinic for children, and advancing preventive dentistry.

W.C. Eastlake, the first American dentist to journey to Japan, in 1860. When the American opened his practice in Yokohama, Yasube Hasegawa worked as his assistant before becoming a dentist himself. Reprinted from "The 100-Year History of The Tokyo Dental Association" published by the Tokyo Dental Association.



The dawn of modern dentistry in Japan

The latest treatment methods, learned from a foreign dentist

In the 1890s when Tomijiro Kobayashi & Co. began selling Lion Dentifrice, dentistry in Japan was just entering the modern age. Up until that time, dental care had been provided by practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine, tooth extraction specialists, people who made dentures, and others. However, after Japan's seclusion ended in 1854, a number of western dentists came to Japan, opened practices to serve foreign residents (and later, Japanese) in Yokohama and elsewhere, and took on Japanese apprentices interested in learning western techniques. The Meiji government was in a hurry to modernize the country, so in 1875 it initiated an exam based on western medicine for those seeking to practice medicine. After Einosuke Obata, who studied under western doctors, became Japan's first dentist, the number of dentists grew steadily. By 1903, when the Dainippon Dental Association (now the Japan Dental Association), the first such national organization, was founded, the total number of dentists nationwide had reached 394. By 1907, membership had increased rapidly to 1,913 dentists. By then, dental clinics had been established in most major cities of Japan.



The Lion Dental Clinic For Children opened in the Ginza district of Tokyo in 1921.

A dental clinic for children in Japan

The Lion Dental Clinic For Children opens

While dental clinics were opening in various places, Lion initiated its dental treatment activities by establishing Japan's first specialized dental clinic for children. Ichitaro Kamiya, the director of Kobayashi at the time, got the idea after visiting various specialized dental clinics for children in the U.S.A. He was deeply impressed by institutions such as The Forsythe Dental Infirmary for Children in Boston and the Rochester Dental Dispensary in New York. "I want to establish a similar facility in Japan," he would say. Some people at the company thought it was premature, but Mr. Kamiya's enthusiasm led to plans for the Lion Dental Clinic For Children. However, unexpected objections were raised by the area's dental association, because at the time, many practitioners were experiencing difficulties due to the depression following the First World War, and some were worried that this new clinic might put even more pressure on their businesses. So Mr. Kamiya, along with Sosaku Midorikawa, who was in charge of the Lion Lecture meetings, persisted in saying that the purpose of the dental clinic was to help society by providing "dental cleaning and caries prevention for children." Three months later, they were finally able to open the clinic.

The Lion Dental Clinic For Children opened after the Great Kanto Earthquake and offered specialized service free of charge.



About 540,000 children treated over 12 years

The first director of The Lion Dental Clinic For Children, Kiyofusa Okamoto, joined Kobayashi at that time, and later was active in promoting dentistry activities at schools. The clinic had three dentists who began treating patients in 1921. A specialized imported dentist's chair fit the bodies of the young patients and the facilities were gradually enhanced, as x-ray and other equipment was introduced, along with additional dental specialists. When the clinic first opened, it served around 45 patients per day, but a year later it was serving around 120 patients per day. As years passed, confidence in the facility grew, and by 1933, 12 years later, the number of children treated had reached the 540,000 mark.

Relief activities after The Great Kanto Earthquake

The big earthquake that struck Tokyo on September 1, 1923 also seriously damaged the Lion Dental Clinic For Children. The devastation was so complete that the clinic's rooftop flag went up in flames, along with the rest of the building, but the consensus of the staff was that relief efforts should take priority over rebuilding the clinic. They quickly formed three dental relief teams, then set up and operated free dental clinics for the next month at three locations in the city. These simple, tent-covered clinics provided treatment and reassurance to about 7200 victims of the disaster.



Oral hygiene nurses also played a part at the Lion Dental Clinic For Children.

Training Japan's first oral hygiene nurses

Preceding government policy by 20 years

The Lion Dental Clinic For Children provided more than just dental treatments. It also served as a new base for a broad range of oral health promotion activities, including guidance for school teaching staff, traveling clinics, and the Lion Children's Rally. Moreover, Japan's first oral hygiene nurses, the predecessors of present-day dental hygienists, were trained there. In the U.S.A. at that time, oral hygiene nurses were effectively "associate dentists." Anticipating the need for such workers in Japan, the clinic started a training course with specialized classes on anatomy, pathology, and nursing science. From 1922 to 1938, the facility sent 29 oral hygiene nurses out into the world, long before the national government began training dental hygienists in 1949.



The great actress Yasue Yamamoto managed to work as a Lion oral hygiene nurse between acting rehearsals.

In 1922, she was a member of the Modern Drama Actress Training School, supervised by second-generation kabuki actor Sadanji Ichikawa. She went on to receive the Minister of Education Award for her performance in the drama "Yuzuru" and achieved great success as a stage actress.

The treatment room at the Nakayama Taiyodo Oral Hygiene Research Center in Osaka.
Reprinted from "Club Cosmetics 100-Year History - Many Flowers Blooming" published by Club Cosmetics Co., Ltd.



Activities by private businesses expand

Oral health promotion activities by Club Cosmetics

The vigorous oral health promotion activities had also spread among other toothpaste makers. In particular, Nakayama Taiyodo (now Club Cosmetics Co., Ltd.), makers of Club Toothpaste, established the Oral Hygiene Research Center inside the Nakayama Cultural Research Center in 1923. Members of this organization focused mainly on encouraging children to brush their teeth, but also operated traveling dental clinics that visited schools around Japan, and visited company offices, factories, military bases, etc. to lecture and screen films on oral hygiene. In 1927, the Club Mobile Dental Treatment Team started touring schools around the country in a vehicle equipped with dental treatment instruments. Nakayama Taiyodo also opened a dental clinic in Osaka, where the company's headquarters were, for training women who wanted to work in or learn more about oral hygiene, dental care and dentistry. This comprehensive facility was equipped for dental preservation, oral surgery, child dentistry and x-ray work. Although the Nakayama Cultural Research Center closed in 1954, it made its mark on the history of oral health promotion in Japan.



The Lion Dental Clinic For Children in 1927, after relocating to Yotsuya.

Preventive dentistry starts ahead of its time

The Lion Dental Center opens

After the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1927, the Lion Dental Clinic For Children relocated to Yotsuya Mitsuke, Yotsuya-ku. With better facilities and more equipment than were originally imaginable, such as treatment, filling, orthodontics and x-ray departments, this medical care system was capable of covering all children's dental care needs. In addition, the Lion Dental Center established an educational agency at the clinic to promote awareness of oral hygiene even more. Efforts focused on promoting mouth cleaning and tartar removal to prevent periodontal disease. This was the beginning of preventive dentistry, currently a major trend, and the precursor to the Grand Tokyo Oral Health Care Station that opened at Tokyo Station in 2013.

The founding of the Lion Dental Hygiene Research Institute

The Lion Dental Clinic For Children was forced to shut down during the Second World War, due to lack of materials. The Lion Foundation for Dental Health founded in 1964 resumed the role of the clinic.

The Lion Family Dental Clinic,
located inside the Shinjuku Keio
Department Store



Creating a world-leading dentistry center

The non-profit Lion Foundation for Dental Health consists of a department that provides health guidance to various organizations, and another department that provides specialized medical care and counseling for children. Among its activities, the Center opened the Lion Family Dental Clinic in Shinjuku Keio Department Store in 1964. With a full staff including 15 dentists and 15 dental hygienists, as well as 10 state-of-the-art examination tables, this clinic thrived so well and so quickly that everyone who worked there was overjoyed at its success.

Among visitors to the clinic department was an elderly man wandering in using a back scratcher. He had received treatment at the first Lion Dental Clinic For Children founded in 1921. Such scenes showed how deeply rooted Lion's original childrens' dental clinic concept had become in society.

At the time, only four facilities in the world, including the Lion Family Dental Clinic, undertook research and also provided prevention care and dental treatment. In 1966, the Lion Family Dental Clinic in Nagoya became the fifth. Lion's dental clinic organization was a leading establishment, not only in Japan, but worldwide.



Tokyo Dental Clinic customizes leading-edge treatments for patients.

Dental treatment evolves

Improving dental professionals' qualifications

Lion's dental treatment-related activities continued to evolve. In 1971, the Osaka Lion Family Corner specializing in caries prevention among children opened on the first floor of what is now the Lion Co., Ltd. Osaka office. The clinic provides a full range of treatments, and has grown into the Osaka Oral Health Station serving everyone from children to the elderly.

The Lion Family Dental Clinic, after relocating from Shinjuku Keio Department Store to Meguro, then moved to Gotanda district in 2014 and was renamed the Tokyo Dental Clinic.

The clinic is fully equipped with the latest facilities, such as wheelchair-accessible care rooms and monitoring rooms, where blood pressure, electrocardiograms, etc. can be monitored during treatment. The facility has also initiated risk control dentistry for measuring patients' risk levels for cavities and periodontal disease, and providing individualized treatments and prevention. The clinic also regularly holds seminars for dental professionals, helping them improve their qualifications, upgrade their technology and continue to meet the challenges of the evolving dental care field.

Lion protects oral health

Corporations very rarely contribute to society in ways that reach beyond their business, even in fields as far-reaching as the medical field. Lion, however, has been doing just that for around 100 years, having established Japan's first specialized dental clinic for children. By matching the high commitment of earlier company members to serve human well-being, as well as the great courage to meet the challenges of the unknown, the company leads the way in evolving dental care in Japan, supporting the oral and overall health of many people.
