

How to find a medical facility if a foreign national is thought to be in need of psychiatric care

If a foreign national who does not have a sufficient understanding of Japanese systems, culture and language is thought to be in need of psychiatric care, information on psychiatric facilities that are best placed to assist with the individual in question can be obtained from local mental health and welfare centres. (Note: The website of the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology has a list of specialists who can provide standard psychiatric care and supervising doctors who teach specialists. (<https://www.jspn.or.jp/modules/senmoni/>))

This list is in Japanese and only lists the general districts and names of doctors practising there. However, it may be possible to suggest doctors practising in the neighbourhood of the person in need of assistance if the name of the doctor in the relevant district is provided to the staff of the mental health and welfare centre by a support worker or other person who can communicate in Japanese.)

The Japan National Tourism Organization also provides information on medical institutions that provide materials in foreign languages. This information is general in nature, so you should contact the relevant medical institution to confirm that treatment is indeed available before making a doctor's appointment.

https://www.jnto.go.jp/emergency/eng/mi_guide.html
As psychiatrists are not usually fluent in foreign languages, interpreters are often required during consultations. In addition to proficiency in Japanese and the relevant foreign language, interpreters must be able to keep medical information confidential and be of legal age. For medical interpreters, the National Association for Medical Interpreters provides a list of organisations (municipalities, international associations, NPOs, etc.) that dispatch medical interpreters in various regions.

<https://national-association-mi.jimdofree.com/>
Alternatively, contact the international association where the person in need of assistance lives for information on medical interpreters or other interpreting services available in the relevant region.

Useful information that foreign nationals should provide when visiting a psychiatric facility

When a foreign national who does not have a sufficient understanding of Japanese systems, culture and language visits a psychiatric facility, he or she will benefit from the most appropriate psychiatric care by providing the following information to the facility.

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| 1. Date of birth | 9. Can a Japanese-speaking person (including an interpreter) accompany the patient? |
| 2. Sex | 10. Is it possible to visit the patient at the convenience of a psychiatrist who speaks a foreign language? |
| 3. Nationality | 11. Current symptoms |
| 4. Language | 12. History of current problems |
| 5. Any special religious needs | 13. Has the patient ever received counselling or treatment? |
| 6. Address | |
| 7. Is the patient or supporter able to pay for medical treatment? | |
| 8. Does the patient have Japanese health insurance or traveller's insurance that can cover payment for treatment in Japan? | |

PURPOSE

Cooperation between related organisations is important in order to facilitate support for mental health and psychiatric care for foreign nationals who do not have a sufficient understanding of Japanese systems, culture and language. The purpose of this document is to deepen cooperation between related organisations and facilitate support when specific cases arise.

WHAT WE DO

"Foreign national" refers to a person whose nationality is other than Japanese and who does not have a full understanding of Japanese institutions, culture or language.

RELATED ORGANISATIONS

For the purposes of this document, the following are assumed to be the main related organisations:

- Mental health and welfare centres
- Foreign embassies and consulates in Japan
- Psychiatrists (specialists of the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology)
- International associations
- Immigration centres

DISTRIBUTION OF THE DOCUMENT

This document will be distributed to the above-mentioned related organisations. In each region of Japan, there are groups that are involved in mental health support activities for foreign nationals, but it is difficult to comprehensively identify these groups. As such, mental health and welfare centres and international associations in each region will be asked to share the document with these groups.

SUPPORT THAT FOREIGN NATIONALS CAN RECEIVE BEFORE IT GETS TO THE STAGE WHERE THEY NEED PSYCHIATRIC CARE

As there may be groups in each region that are involved in mental health support activities for foreign nationals, local mental health and welfare centres and international associations are requested to add region-specific information when they share their materials.

One form of support that is currently available throughout Japan for those who are not yet at the stage where they need psychiatric care is TELL's free, anonymous telephone consultation service in English (03-5774-0992, <https://telljp.com/lifeline/>).

DISCLAIMER

The author (Dr. Tsuyoshi Akiyama, Committee of the International Affairs of the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology) has verified the information contained in this pamphlet as much as possible. However, the information may change over time, and various circumstances may arise depending on the medical institution and the embassy involved, when foreign citizens in Japan are treated. Therefore, there is no guarantee of any kind, either expressed or implied, in this material as to circumstances that may arise. The responsibility for the interpretation and use of this material solely lies with the user. In no event shall the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology or British Embassy Tokyo be liable for any damages arising from its use.

PSYCHIATRIC CARE FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS : PROMOTING COOPERATION BETWEEN RELATED ORGANISATIONS

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Examples of useful assistance for psychiatrists

- Provide interpretation if the Japanese psychiatrist does not speak the relevant foreign language (or request an interpreter to be dispatched, or provide a referral to an external interpreting service) Note: Some countries do not dispatch interpreters.
- Visit the patient
- Explain the patient's situation to the family – If the family is not in Japan, contact the patient's family in his or her home country
- Ask about the patient and family's ability to bear the cost of hospitalisation and treatment, and inform the psychiatric facility

Coordination when patients are returning to their home country

Embassy and consulate staff

If it is possible to request the cooperation of doctors and pharmacists through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc., of the patient's home country, check information on the availability of drugs used in Japan in the patient's home country for when the patient returns home.

If family members from the patient's home country are coming to pick up the patient, make arrangements.

Contact the airline to find out what documentation the psychiatrist needs to provide and have the documentation form sent to the psychiatric facility (ask family members to contact the airline if they can do so).

(Note: The extent to which assistance is available varies from country to country and should be checked with the relevant embassy or consulate.)

Psychiatrists

If the psychiatrist can confirm the availability of medication upon the patient's return home, the prescription should be adjusted accordingly.

Complete the form sent by the airline.

Complete the medical information form.

If traveller's insurance or other insurance can pay for a medical escort, a medical escort may be provided. In this case, the accompanying medical escort should be informed.

COORDINATION WITH EMBASSIES AND CONSULATES IN RELATION TO PSYCHIATRIC INPATIENT TREATMENT

It is not the responsibility of psychiatrists to provide assistance, such as interpretation, to enable foreign nationals to receive treatment if they require psychiatric care. Nor are there any Japanese public institutions tasked with providing such assistance. Therefore, if a foreign national is to receive inpatient treatment in a Japanese psychiatric facility, in order to provide medical treatment it is necessary for a Japanese psychiatrist to obtain the following support from the embassy or consulate of the patient's home country, or from family, friends or other supporters. If such cooperation and support cannot be obtained from any source, including the embassy or consulate, the Japanese psychiatrist may not be able to provide treatment on the grounds that they are "unable to communicate with the patient as necessary for treatment".

As there are differences in the scope of assistance provided by different countries to their own citizens, it is advisable to contact the embassy or consulate of the respective country soon after medical treatment of a foreign national patient has commenced, after having confirmed the patient's consent and requested their cooperation. (If the patient does not agree to contact the embassy or consulate and the patient is deemed competent to make decisions for him or herself, then the embassy or consulate cannot be contacted.)

In some countries, if the patient has the capacity to make decisions for him or herself, the embassy or consulate may not be able to provide smooth support and cooperation without written consent from the patient. If the patient lacks the capacity to make decisions for him or herself, it may be necessary to submit a medical certificate.

The possibility of the patient's visa expiring while the he or she is undergoing psychiatric care in a Japanese facility should be confirmed between the attending doctor and the patient or the person assisting the patient. If there is a possibility of the patient's visa expiring during psychiatric care, the Immigration Bureau will determine the period of extension based on the attending doctor's diagnosis. In this case, close cooperation between the individual (or the person supporting him or her), the hospital or clinic, the embassy and the immigration authorities is necessary.

Medical interview by a psychiatrist

The website of the Japanese Society of Transcultural Psychiatry includes a medical questionnaire (in English, Italian, Dutch, Spanish, Taiwanese, Tagalog, Chinese, German, French, Portuguese and Russian) as a resource to assist in the treatment of foreign nationals. (<https://www.jstp.net/ForeignJapan.htm>)

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) also provides translated versions of instruction documents and consent forms, as well as foreign language materials on the hospitalisation flow. (https://www.mhlw.go.jp/seisakunitsuite/bunya/hukushi_kaigo/shougaisah_ukushi/kaisei_seisin/youshiki.html)

Inpatient psychiatric care

When inpatient psychiatric care is required, information needs to be shared on such things as the form of hospitalisation, hospitalisation requirements and those giving consent, cost bearers, and procedures related to hospitalisation.

Currently, hospitalisation in psychiatric facilities in Japan can be divided into the following forms: voluntary hospitalisation, involuntary admission, hospitalisation for medical care and protection, and emergency hospitalisation.

This section describes the eligibility, requirements, burden of costs and procedures related to hospitalisation for each type of admission. For hospitalisations other than voluntary hospitalisation, a consultation with a psychiatrist qualified by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare as a designated physician of mental health is required.

Voluntary hospitalisation

Applicability

- People requiring hospitalisation due to a mental disorder
- Requirements

- The consent of the individual is required; a decision by a designated physician of mental health is not required

Expenses (co-payment)

- To be borne by the patient

Procedures related to hospitalisation

- The legal context behind voluntary hospitalisation is notified at the time of admission.

Hospitalisation for Medical Care and Protection

Applicability

- Persons who are not at risk of harming themselves or others, but require hospitalisation due to a mental disorder and are not in a condition to be voluntarily hospitalised with their consent

Requirements

- Diagnosis by one designated physician of mental health that "hospitalisation for medical care and protection is necessary"
- Consent of one family member

Expenses

- To be borne by the family or the patient

Procedures related to hospitalisation

- If there is no family member in Japan who can give consent, it is legally possible for the mayor of the municipality where the patient lives to give consent on behalf of the family member. In this case, the mayor of the municipality does not bear the costs of hospitalisation and treatment, so the issue of the burden of costs is to be clarified separately.

Involuntary hospitalisation

Applicability

- Persons who are at risk of harming themselves or others if not hospitalised due to a mental disorder

Requirements

- Two designated physician of mental health must agree on the diagnosis of "involuntary hospitalisation is necessary"

Expenses

- to be borne by the prefecture

Procedures related to hospitalisation

- Involuntary hospitalisation to be authorised by the prefectural governor
- Discharge decision made on medical judgement and cannot be given based on requests by the person or care givers.

References and information

Information on embassies and consulates
https://www.mofa.go.jp/about/emb_cons/protocol/a-h.html

Tokyo English Life Line (TELL), a service which provides free and anonymous telephone advice in English
03-5774-0992, <https://telljp.com/lifeline/>

List of specialists and advisors of the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology
<https://www.jspn.or.jp/modules/senmoni/>

Japan National Tourism Organization
https://www.jnto.go.jp/emergency/eng/mi_guide.html

Website of the National Association for Medical Interpreters
<https://national-association-mi.jimdofree.com/>

Questions for psychiatric interview in English, Tagalog, Dutch, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, German, French, Russian, Chinese and Taiwanese
<https://www.jstp.net/ForeignJapan.htm>

Translated versions of instruction documents and consent forms, as well as foreign language materials on the hospitalisation flow (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW))

Example airline form
(A QR code should be attached after materials are finalised and before distribution)
<https://www.qrcode-monkey.com/>