

*Innovation Using Ancient Wisdom***MARTIAL CARE**

As Japanese society ages, the physical burden placed on nursing caregivers has become evident. Many caregivers suffer strained backs and shoulders while trying to move elderly or disabled people or helping them to stand up at their home or in nursing care facilities.

Nursing care assisted by techniques from *kobujutsu* (ancient martial arts) has gained attention in recent years as a means of alleviating these burdens. Kobujutsu in this case are martial arts developed by samurai fighters during the Edo period (1603–1867). This form of nursing care incorporates the body movements and thinking of these martial arts for assistance.

“Common in the body movements of kobujutsu for attack and defense is that they do not rely on muscular strength and therefore have no physical burden,” says Shinichiro Okada. “Kobujutsu nursing care makes care possible without exerting unnecessary force, because the care worker uses his or her body rationally.”

For example, one of the basic body movements in this form of nursing care is turning the palms outwards when lifting. This technique can be applied in various situations, such as when a caregiver helps the care-receiver to lift his or her upper body, stand up, or sit down. The procedure is as follows. The caregiver embraces the upper body of the care-receiver using the back of the hands, imparting just the right amount of tension on the care-receiver’s shoulders and back with the forearms. Maintaining this tension, the

caregiver turns his or her palms inward and then flexes the forearms repeatedly to move the care receiver bit by bit. In this way, the caregiver uses the strength of his or her hands, arms and back together, reducing the burden of lifting.

While working at an elderly nursing care facility, Okada continued searching for nursing care methods to replace conventional ones. In the process, he learned of the kobujutsu practiced by martial artist Yoshinori Kono, and in 2004 he proposed the concept of kobujutsu nursing care. Okada now teaches this form of nursing care at about 250 locations every year, in seminars held at medical institutions, nursing care institutions, and for the general public. He has taught a total of some 100,000 people. Many participants have noted that they now find nursing care easier and their back pain has improved.

“The movements found in kobujutsu are useful not only for nursing care; these rational movements can be applied in many aspects of our daily lives, such as when holding a baby or lifting heavy objects,” says Okada. “There is a plan to have my book on kobujutsu nursing care translated into English. Both as nursing techniques and as ideas for care prevention, kobujutsu nursing care could be popularized in societies where aging is progressing.”



Shinichiro Okada demonstrates a lifting technique using the back of the hand.

COURTESY OF SHINICHIRO OKADA