

PROFILES

Toshio Kurokawa (1897–1988) **Chairman of the Japanese Delegation 1965–1979**

Dr. Toshio Kurokawa was born on January 15, 1897, in Mikasa, Hokkaido and earned his medical degree from Tohoku University in 1922. He received post-graduate training at Vienna University where he was impressed by the use of new X-ray techniques to diagnose stomach cancer. At the time, stomach cancer was the most prevalent kind of cancer in Japan so, after returning to Japan, Dr. Kurokawa continued studies on its early diagnosis. He and his collaborator, Dr. Masaharu Nishiyama, succeeded in developing photofluorographic methods to examine the stomach and they applied their new techniques to screen for early-stage stomach cancer. Throughout much of his career, Dr. Kurokawa worked at Tohoku University. He was professor of medicine (1941–1963), dean of medicine (1948–1954), and president of Tohoku University (1957–1963).¹ After resigning his position as university president, he was invited by the Japanese Foundation for Cancer Research to become the Director of the Cancer Research Institute Hospital in Tokyo in 1963.

By 1965 when the USJCMSP was established, Dr. Kurokawa had become one of the most eminent clinicians and medical scientists in Japan, and was regarded as an excellent leader. He became the first Chair of the Japanese Delegation to the U.S.–Japan Program and, during his tenure with the USJCMSP, Dr. Kurokawa encouraged the growth and development of the Program in many ways. When the Program began, only five Joint Panels existed—on cholera, leprosy, parasitic diseases, tuberculosis, and viral diseases. By January 18, 1979, when Dr. Kurokawa announced his retirement from the USJCMSP, the Program included eight Joint Panels. The Japanese and U.S. Malnutrition Panels were added in 1966, and the Environmental Mutagenesis and Carcinogenesis Panels in 1972. The Japanese and U.S. Hepatitis Panels were approved in 1978, following the Hepatitis Symposium held in Tokyo,² and were formally established in 1979. Dr. Kurokawa also played a prominent role in developing the guidelines for panel review and evaluation; the guidelines he helped develop were adopted in 1971.

Dr. Kurokawa brought a perspective to the U.S.–Japan Program that continues to shape it today. He emphasized the need for the Program to remain focused on a few disease areas, rather than diffuse its efforts too broadly. He recognized the special, bilateral relationship between Japan and the United States, but also emphasized the importance of involving scientists from many Asian countries, as well as other international organizations, including the World Health Organization. “Above all, he insisted that success in science is rarely measured over the short term, [and] that the Joint Committee must think creatively about the future,” Dr. Ivan Bennett Jr., who was Chairman of the U.S. Delegation to the USJCMSP (1972–1990), wrote in a profile of Dr. Kurokawa.³

When Dr. Kurokawa retired from the USJCMSP, members of the Joint Delegation honored his distinguished service:

His excellent leadership based on his deep insight, breadth of knowledge, and warm personality achieved for him the high esteem of all members of the Joint Committee. During his tenure as Co-chairman of the Joint Committee, he made many outstanding contributions to the growth and development of the Program. His close collaborations and excellent rapport with the U.S. Co-chairman [initially, Dr. Colin MacLeod; later, Dr. Ivan Bennett] contributed greatly to the work of the Joint Committee and Joint Panels. His wise counsel and stabilizing influence were always evident.⁴

Dr. Kurokawa died of a sudden heart attack on February 21, 1988. His family and many friends held a funeral ceremony to honor him on March 3, 1988, at the Honganji Temple, Tsukiji in Tokyo. Dr. Ivan Bennett attended the ceremony and wrote this about Dr. Kurokawa:

Dr. Kurokawa was a cultured gentleman of the old school, of formal and dignified demeanor and utmost propriety. In informal settings, however, he was possessed of a warm, self-deprecating sense of humor and was a delightful and relaxed social companion. He would spend hours reminiscing on the past or patiently explaining the origins of Japanese customs and culture to friends. It is fair to say that his passing makes the end of an era. The U.S.-Japan Cooperative Medical Research [*sic*] Program is a living monument to his memory.”⁵

Dr. Norio Suwa of Tohoku University, who had been a member of the Japanese Delegation from 1974–1979, succeeded Dr. Kurokawa as Chairman of the Japanese Delegation.

Footnotes

¹ Bennett IL Jr. Toshio Kurokawa, M.D. (1897–1988). *Jpn J Cancer Res.* 1988 Jun; 79(6): 772–4.

² The 1978 Hepatitis Symposium took place in Tokyo in conjunction with the 14th meeting of the USJCMSP Joint Committee. [See - The United States–Japan Cooperative Medical Science Program. Third Five Year Report: 1975–1980. Department of State Publication 9127: East Asian and Pacific Series 217. Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, p. 2.]

³ Bennett IL Jr., p. 774.

⁴ The United States–Japan Cooperative Medical Science Program. Third Five Year Report: 1975–1980. Department of State Publication 9127: East Asian and Pacific Series 217. Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, p. vii.

⁵ Bennett IL Jr., p. 774.