For the SDF to perform its mission, SDF personnel must remain in good health through appropriate management of their health. Also, it is important that the SDF always seeks to enhance its capabilities in military medicine, such as first aid capabilities for protecting the lives of the personnel engaging in a variety of services as much as possible. Under the circumstance where the SDF’s missions are becoming more diverse and internationalized, it is important to appropriately and accurately carry out medical activities such as medical care in disaster relief dispatches and international peace cooperation activities.

The MOD/SDF, therefore, is enhancing and strengthening its capabilities in military medicine to be able to appropriately carry out a variety of its missions, including in response to various emergency events and international peace cooperation activities.

1 SDF Hospitals as Hub Hospitals with Enhanced Functions

The role of SDF hospitals is to admit and treat injured SDF personnel and other persons transported from their area of activity in various emergency situations, while in normal circumstances these hospitals provide medical care to SDF personnel and their families. These hospitals also play the role of educational institutions that train medical personnel and maintain and enhance their skills.

For this reason, based on the NDPG, etc., the MOD aspires to establish a high-quality medical care system through measures such as promoting the centralization of SDF hospitals with increased performance levels, by consolidating 16 SDF hospitals located nationwide into roughly 10 locations to develop more efficient and higher-quality hospitals.

2 Strengthening the Function of the National Defense Medical College

As the only educational institution for the training of physicians as well as public health and registered nurses under the jurisdiction of the MOD/SDF, the National Defense Medical College plays the role of training and producing the primary medical staff for the medical activities of the SDF as well as maintaining and improving their skills.

In such a situation, the NDPG, etc. states that the MOD/SDF will establish an efficient and high-quality medical care system, including improved management of the National Defense Medical College Hospital. At the same time, based on the NDPG which notes that the function of the National Defense Medical College would be strengthened as the training and research center for defense medicine, the MOD intends to strengthen the organizational structure of the National Defense Medical College, enhance its training and research functions, and strengthen its cooperation with all three branches of the SDF.

3 Enhancement of Education of Medical Officers and Nurses

While greater abilities are required of personnel engaged in medical care, such as medical officers, due to the diversification of missions, only 80% of the positions have been filled in the case of medical officers in particular. Such low sufficiency is caused by medical officers leaving the SDF, one of the major reasons of which is the lack of opportunity to engage in medical training and practice. The MOD/SDF will make efforts to
implement various measures to prevent medical officers from leaving the SDF by enhancing clinical education after graduation from the National Defense Medical College and other institutions, promoting various initiatives for ensuring more opportunities for medical officers to engage in medical practice, helping them acquire and improve specialized knowledge and skills in areas such as infectious diseases, as well as increasing their motivation for work.

Furthermore, with the aim of training and securing high-quality nurses who are capable of fully responding to the diversification of missions and the sophistication of medical technology, a four-year “nursing program” was established in the School of Medicine at the National Defense Medical College in April 2014 for the training of public health/registered nurses. The first batch of students will graduate from the College in March 2018.

Moreover, medical personnel and medical staff are educated and trained at medical care-related schools and other relevant institutions so that the SDF can perform diverse missions and missions under special circumstances.

To Become a Nursing Officer

Kyoka Kondo, SDF, Nursing officer candidate, Nursing School, National Defense Medical College (Tokorozawa City, Saitama Prefecture)

We entered Nursing School at the National Defense Medical College in April 2014 as the first class of SDF nursing officer candidates. Our graduation is scheduled in March 2018. I have been studying studiously every day and also gaining various experiences in military training and daily life. After graduation, I hope to become a nursing officer who can serve as a nurse and a public health nurse, making an active contribution not only within Japan but also in the world. A nursing officer has both the role of a nurse and SDF personnel. I think that nursing officers should be able to provide emotional and moral support to patients and other SDF personnel. I believe providing emotional support consists of fully understanding and having trust in others, while offering moral support is based on mutual trust and comprehension. Rapport is the cornerstone of our mission. Taking pride as the first class of nursing officers of Nursing School at the National Defense Medical College, along with having heartfelt appreciation to our seniors, our mission should not only be to follow the footsteps of our senior nursing officers, but also to open a new vista with our own might and courage. I am determined to be a nursing officer who is needed not just as “one of many out there” but as “the nursing officer.”

Enhancement of First Aid Capabilities on the Frontline

Based on the NDPG and other guidelines stating that the MOD “conducts a review on emergency medical treatment on situational responses and improves first aid capabilities on the frontline,” the MOD/SDF has conducted research on relevant initiatives taken by the U.S. Forces and carried out reviews for appropriate and accurate life-saving activities. For the purpose of deepening this review, the “Committee on accurate life-saving for the MOD/SDF first aid activities on the frontline” comprised of external experts, was held at the MOD in April 2015, and a report was prepared in September 2016 based on the discussions in the Committee. The MOD/SDF is working to develop a framework for providing maximum protection for the lives of the personnel injured on the
frontline as much as possible. Specifically, since 2017, the MOD commenced specific education and training for SDF personnel who are certified as both Licensed Practical Nurses and Emergency Life-Saving Technicians to acquire necessary knowledge and skills, so that the SDF personnel with these qualifications will be able to provide specialized relief treatments\(^3\) on the spot to SDF personnel who were injured on the frontline, prior to their transfer to SDF hospitals and other medical facilities.

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**5 Improving the Capabilities to Deal With Infectious Diseases**

In light of the response to the Ebola virus disease outbreak in West Africa in 2014, the Ministerial Meeting on Measures on Emerging Infectious Diseases was established in September 2015 under close cooperation among relevant administrative bodies, for the entire government to advance effective and comprehensive measures on infectious diseases that could be a global threat. In the same month of the same year, a decision was made on the Basic Guidelines for Strengthening Measures on Emerging Infectious Diseases. This basic guideline stipulates that, “The Government of Japan will promote the improvement of the ability to address emerging infectious diseases at the Ministry of Defense and the Japan Self-Defense Forces by training human resources who have expertise that is necessary to contribute to the Japan Self-Defense Forces’ overseas activities and by accelerating the establishment of a framework including the National Defense Medical College.” In response to this, the MOD/SDF conducts various reviews on the enhancement of capabilities to respond to infectious diseases, a potential global threat. Based on these reviews as well as other factors, the MOD/SDF is currently improving the necessary facility equipment at the National Defense Medical College Hospital and the SDF Central Hospital. The aims of this improvement are to provide personnel training for the enhancement of capabilities to deal with infectious diseases and develop readiness for offering medical treatment to patients affected by Class I infectious diseases,\(^4\) which are classified as the most dangerous category of infectious diseases. The SDF Central Hospital was designated as a medical institution for Class I infectious diseases in April 2017.

In addition, the MOD also conducts research on advanced initiatives implemented by the French Armed Forces and the Italian Armed Forces, and collects information by seizing opportunities such as defense medicine exchanges for the purpose of contributing to the enhancement of capabilities to deal with infectious diseases.

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\(^3\) First aid treatment for those with symptoms such as airway obstruction and tension pneumothorax caused by injuries, and other treatments such as administration of analgesic for pain relief.

\(^4\) Ebola hemorrhagic fever, Crimean–Congo hemorrhagic fever, smallpox, South American hemorrhagic fevers, plague, Marburg disease, and Lassa disease (Article 6, Act on the Prevention of Infectious Diseases and Medical Care for Patients with Infectious Diseases)