Bengaluru in southern India is a city that encapsulates the dynamically growing India of today. While it is a modern city with an intense concentration of IT and biotech industries—not to mention its population of over 10 million—it also faces multiple challenges, such as poverty and slow progress in the development of its social infrastructure. With a growing economy and the largest population in the world, the demand for quality in the field of medical care across the country as a whole is also rising, but access to such services is meager, with shortages of both doctors and hospital beds. There are also serious inequalities in the country’s medical care due partly to the underdeveloped health insurance system. Recent years have seen Japanese companies initiating activities in India to address such issues. A leading pioneer in the field is Bengaluru’s Sakra World Hospital, the first general hospital in India to be run by Japanese management. It has more than 220 physicians providing advanced acute care in over 35 specialist fields, including those related to neurological disorders and cardiovascular and digestive diseases. It is operated by Secom Medical System Co., Ltd., which, among other activities, engages in hospital management support and offers home nursing services in Japan, and Toyota Tsusho Corporation, the trading arm of the Toyota Group.

The hospital now has some 1,400 new inpatients per month, but when it was founded in 2014, it initially faced a mountain of challenges—from the establishment of an adequate management system to the development of human resources. ISHIDA Shiori of the hospital management division of Secom Medical System said, “While learning from scratch about medical care in India, we have strived to create a system that provides safe medicine.” By practicing kaizen (the business philosophy of constantly reviewing operations to improve work efficiency and safety) in all its departments, the hospital upgraded the effectiveness of many of its operations—including responses to nurse calls and waiting times in the hospital pharmacy—and significantly enhanced the awareness of the staff.

Focus is also placed on interaction with Japanese medical institutions. Not only do doctors actively conduct mutual visits and joint case reviews, but selected members of the nursing team also visit Japanese hospitals to learn about nursing operations. “This training has had a significant impact. The key to attracting and developing excellent human resources is the provision of learning opportunities that money cannot buy,” said Ishida.

While enhancing the quality of medical care, the hospital also aims to provide care to a broader swath of the population. Nearly 50 of the 307 hospital beds are the simple economy type, enhancing accessibility for lower-income patients. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 5,900 patients, regardless of financial status, were treated. “At first, there were some who were strongly opposed to such an indiscriminate approach to treatment. But the hospital’s emphasis on the equality of all human lives helped it to gain the trust of the local people,” said Ishida. The number of patients choosing the hospital has continued to increase, even since the pandemic’s containment.

Now, one future goal of the hospital is to build a system providing seamless care—from convalescent care following hospital discharge to home medical care support—by establishing clinics and providing home-care services in the surrounding communities. Ishida explained that “primary care and postoperative follow-ups will be conducted at clinics or at home, and patients who need detailed examinations or surgery will be sent to Sakra. In Japan, this is known as a community-based integrated care system,” but the concept itself has yet to be introduced to India on a national scale. Since 2019, Sakra has been operating its first clinic and offering home-care services. Utilizing the experiences at Sakra to build a system that meets the needs of Indian society: such efforts will surely constitute a step toward a more secure and abundant future.