

Fukushima sees shortage of nursing care staff to look after elderly

The Yomiuri Shimbun

FUKUSHIMA--A shortage of nursing care staff has grown serious in Fukushima Prefecture as 104 caregivers and nurses for the elderly had quit their jobs as of July to evacuate the prefecture after the crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, according to officials at the Association of Geriatric Health Services Facilities.

The 104 nurses and caregivers who left worked at 35 health and nursing-care institutions for the elderly, according to a survey conducted by the association based in Fukushima Prefecture.

The survey targeted 67 out of the 71 facilities belonging to the association and excluded four that are currently closed. All facilities gave valid responses.

About 90 percent of those who quit were women in their 20s, 30s and 40s. An official at the association said, "Employees with small children evacuated outside the prefecture for fear of negative effects from exposure to radiation."

As for filling the shortage, 28 facilities, or 42 percent, responded they have not secured new staff. Regarding their staffing needs, 15 facilities reported needing "at least three more caregivers" while four reported needing "at least three more nurses."

The number of elderly people qualified to receive long-term nursing care is increasing in devastated areas partly due to physical and mental fatigue from their protracted experience as evacuees.

The figure increased by 40 percent in the past year in Minami-Soma. The sharp increase in this segment of the elderly population is believed to have worsened the staffing shortage.

In Fukushima Prefecture, the staffing shortage has also spread at special-assistance nursing homes for the elderly. In cooperation with nursing-care facilities in other prefectures, the association has accepted 10 backup personnel from outside.

However, those employees will return to their homes in several weeks to three months. An official at the association said, "We will also ask the central government for assistance with measures such as long-term dispatch of personnel and recruitment staff."

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