

INTERVIEWS

Am einfachsten sind Interviews auf Deutsch. Um zu begreifen, was international passiert, führt aber an Englisch kein Weg vorbei. Wir empfinden diese Zweitsprache als wunderbares Transportmittel für Ideen. Wir wissen aber auch, wie es sich anfühlt in einer anderen Sprache um Worte zu ringen. Das verleiht uns im Gespräch mit anderen Nicht-Muttersprachlern Geduld. Und den Willen, den Kern einer Sache zu finden, über Sprachbarrieren hinweg.

INTERVIEWS Doing interviews in German is easy. However, in order to grasp international developments, there is no way around English. We consider our second language a wonderful way of transporting ideas. We also know how it feels to struggle for words in a foreign language. One consequence is patience with other non-native speakers. We want to get to the core of a subject, despite potential language barriers.

Life beyond disaster

Fukushima after 3/11

Fumio Shishido is professor emeritus at Fukushima Medical University two hours North of Tokyo, Japan. He has been dealing with radiation effects and emergencies for decades. When the Fukushima triple catastrophe – earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident – hit in March 2011, he was prepared, but things turned out differently than expected.

What did you do, when the big earthquake hit Fukushima back in March 2011?

Fumio Shishido: I was teaching students. We were in a conference room high up on the 10th floor of the university hospital building. Suddenly the building started wobbling. The earthquake lasted five minutes nonstop, but felt much longer.

After the building had stopped shaking, I checked whether the students were all right. We were lucky, nothing had fallen from the

ceiling, nobody was damaged. I visited the patients together with my students. Finally, I inspected our radiology equipment.

Had you experienced anything like this before?

I had been in two big quakes before – one was in the 1970ties, in Sendai City, North of Fukushima. We had very little human damage back then. I also experienced a big earthquake at work in the Akita prefecture northwest of Fukushima. A patient was in the CT machine during the quake and we had to pull him from the gantry right away.

When you learned of the tsunami after the quake, how did you prepare for emergency patients?

At first, we had no idea what was going on. Outside communication was completely disrupted. But we knew from the big earthquake in Kobe 1995 that very likely a lot of trauma patients would be coming in. Especially pelvic fractures are common. So we made sure that the interventional department was on standby for these patients. I remembered the Kobe knowledge immediately and made sure we were prepared.

When did patients start to come in?

They never did. We only treated three trauma patients – that was it.

Why?

My interpretation of the situation is that the tsunami washed away injured people. They were not able to make it to the hospital. I heard that the situation was similar in the Miyagi and Iwate prefectures.

Would you have been able to treat patients?

Yes. Although the water supply was suspended, we still had electricity and gas. The main street to the hospital was blocked, but fortunately we had other ways to access the site. It still took hours to get to the hospital and back home, though.

How were you able to work without water?

We have a water tank on top of the roof, which lasts for about a week. So we were able to cover the basics. But we made sure to use water only when we really needed it, which was basically for surgeries. We were for example instructed to not flush the toilet. I stayed here for three consecutive nights after the earthquake.

When did you find out about the magnitude of the disaster?

The first day we thought we would get some trauma patients – which did not happen. On the second day we heard that something was wrong with the nuclear power plant. So I stayed in the hospital and tried to confirm the facts.

Long before this earthquake, the government had assigned me to take a lead in treating patients exposed to radiation in an emergency situation. I was responsible for taking care of these patients.

Since when did the government prepare for radiation emergencies?

After the critical nuclear power plant incident 15 years ago. It happened in Tokaimura, which is in the Ibaraki prefecture, South of Fukushima, in the Northeast part of the Kanto region, where Tokyo is located.

The incident is less known outside of Japan. On Sept 30 1999, three workers were contaminated during preparations for an experimental fast breeder reactor. Two of them died. After that, the government funded some core locations to prepare for incidents like that – and to take care of potential patients. Being in charge of one of these core locations was one of my hidden roles, even before 3/11.

What exactly did you do when you knew that radiation might be leaking from Fukushima Daiichi?

We have a building designated for that purpose on the backside of the hospital site. I called the relevant personnel to that building and we prepared ourselves for whatever might be coming.

What happened next?

On the next day, March 12, a small-scale explosion happened at the Daiichi nuclear plant. People living closeby in Futaba evacuated from their hometown to this hospital. They were very concerned about radiation exposure, so we measured them using dosimeter. Thankfully, everyone was okay. That was the beginning.

Two days later, on March 14, pieces from a hydrogen explosion at Fukushima Daiichi unit 3 – one of the six plants at the site – hit people from the Japanese self-defense forces that were there to help.

Were they badly injured?

Only one person was affected. First, we were told he was seriously injured, but we saw him and it was only a minor neck injury. We hospitalized him for two days – just in case.

Altogether we were involved in the treatment of 12 patients that were injured or exposed. The feet of two power plant workers were contaminated with radioactivity. Our manual provides a set procedure for this, so we measured the radiation level they were exposed to and decontaminated these patients.

Did everything work according to the emergency manual?

We were supposed to be notified from a prefectural organization that patients were coming. That did not happen until the last minute. I got the information that patients were coming to our university hospital from watching TV.

How has your patient's perception of radiation changed after the incident?

The response depends on the person, but generally, people learned about radiation exposure. In the past, people did not think about exposure to radiation at all. Now patients ask questions. Many people in our area are still concerned about radioactivity and their health.

How can you react to these concerns?

One example is the new Fukushima Global Medical Science Center,

which is built right next to our hospital. It is going to be a very advanced high-tech treatment facility focusing on research and health protection. We will, for example, screen children's thyroid glands. We will also provide a medical checkup to the citizens and analyze the results. Some people have mental problems, anxiety being a major one. We are also going to expand our floor space for research and cancer treatment.

How is the daily life in Fukushima now?

There are some serious areas, but other than that, people are living their lives. Here in Fukushima city, the radioactivity level is marginally enhanced, but people live here without any problems. I would like visitors to see that: There was a disaster, but in the surrounding areas, people move on.

Knapp 60km Luftlinie vom Fukushima Daiichi Kraftwerk entfernt liegt die Uniklinik Fukushima. Der dortige Leiter der Radiologie, Fumio Shishido, erzählte uns von 3/11 und den Ereignissen nach der Katastrophe. Eine Stunde dauerte das Gespräch, aber nach den ersten Sätzen hatten alle in dem kleinen Hinterzimmer der Uniklinik Zeit und Raum vergessen. Das Interview ist online erschienen. Fukushima University Hospital is just 35 miles from the Fukushima Daiichi power plant. On a grey and cold autumn day, Fumio Shishido took time to share his experiences after the 3/11 catastrophe. We talked for an hour in an unspectacular backroom at Fukushima University Hospital. Right after he started talking, we forgot everything around us. The interview was published online.



Fumio Shishido hat die Radiologie der Universitätsklinik Fukushima 30 Jahre geleitet. Die Zeit seit März 2011 bezeichnet er als Ausnahmezustand. Aber Fukushima wird sich wieder aufrappeln, sagt er. Fumio Shishido has been working at Fukushima University Hospital for more than 30 years. He calls the years since 3/11 "exceptional" and demanding. He believes Fukushima will recover, as always.

Fukushima heißt direkt übersetzt „Glücksinsel“. Die Hauptstadt der gleichnamigen Präfektur in Norden Tokios liegt am Fuß des Ou-Gebirges, rund 50 km landeinwärts der Pazifikküste. Fukushima translates as „happy island“ or „fortunate place“. The capital of the Fukushima prefecture is located North of Tokyo, right next to the Ou mountain range, and about 30 miles from the Pacific Coast.

Die Uniklinik Fukushima baut vor ihrer Tür ein „Global Medical Science Center“. Es ist für Vorsorgeuntersuchungen zuständig, wird aber auch Gesundheitsdaten sammeln und auf Strahlenfolgen auswerten. Fukushima Medical University is building a „Global Medical Science Center“. It provides screening and does epidemiological studies and analyses on radiation effects.





Im Strahlen-Informationszentrum zeigen Modellfiguren, wie Dekontamination funktioniert: Erde abtragen, in Plastiksäcke packen, an Sammelstellen abladen, wieder mit Erde bedecken, sehr lange lagern. The Radiation Information Center in Fukushima City uses detailed models to show how decontamination works. Contaminated soil is put into blue plastic bags and piled up at numerous so-called hot spots.

Die Realität im Sperrgebiet ist dreckiger. Die ArbeiterInnen wühlen sich durch den Schutt, den Flutwelle und Erdbeben übrig gelassen haben. Reality in the red zone is much dirtier. The workers plough through all the radioactive debris earthquake, tsunami and nuclear catastrophe have left.

Eine der vielen Herausforderungen für die Dekontaminier-Teams: Die Flut hat das Boot kilometerweit ins Landesinnere gespült. Just one of many challenges for the decontamination teams in the Fukushima region: The tsunami has carried this ship kilometers into the mainland.





Die Nuklearkatastrophe hat den ehemaligen Bewohnern des Sperrgebiets den Rest gegeben: Leben dort ist für lange Zeit unmöglich. Fukushima Stadt liegt außerhalb des Sperrgebiets. The nuclear disaster has devastated people's houses in the red zone – and their lives. Fukushima City is outside the red zone.

Der Tsunami hat an der Küste breite Korridore kompletter Verwüstung hinterlassen. The flood has left wide corridors of devastation.

Die höflichen Umgangsformen der Japaner sind trotz Katastrophe und Sperrgebiet geblieben. The Japanese people have maintained their good manners and polite behavior, despite the triple catastrophe and the red zone.



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