

Laudation
given by Professor Holsboer on occasion of the retirement ceremony of
Professor Higuchi as President of the National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry

Tokyo, April 23rd, 2016

Dear Professor Teruhiko Higuchi
Dear Mrs. Higuchi
Ladies & Gentlemen and distinguished
guests

Today one of the greatest clinician scientists of his time is celebrated for his tremendous achievements in psychiatry, Professor Teruhiko Higuchi.

I had the privilege to meet Professor Higuchi while he was still a professor at Showa University in the 1990ies. At that time I was already appointed as director of the Max-Planck Institute of Psychiatry in Munich – a research Institute for Psychiatry founded almost 100 years ago by the most influential psychiatrist – the eminent Emil Kraepelin.



Being one of the successors of Kraepelin comes with many obligations related to tradition. Indeed, I felt obliged to resume the collegial and scientific relationship between German and Japanese psychiatrists. That relationship was first established by Emil Kraepelin and Shūzō Kure, who studied with Kraepelin. These two psychiatrists are viewed today as the most important reformers of both psychiatric health care and research based on natural sciences.

At that time, the big question I had to resolve was: Whom should I approach to re-establish this relationship between both countries? I was lucky when a dear Japanese friend hinted to me that Professor Higuchi would be the coming star in academic psychiatry and that he would be the right person.

In retrospect, we can only applaud this advice.

In Munich, we attempted to reengineer the Max-Planck Institute into a fully integrated Research Plant where clinicians, chemists, physicists and biologists work closely together. At the same time, Professor Higuchi decided to take a Herculean task and brought six independent research institutes under one single roof. A big National Center Hospital, National Institutes of Neuroscience, of Mental Health and of Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Research were integrated together with Centers for Suicide Prevention and Translational Medicine. The complexity of these closely connected institutions is bewildering when viewed from outside.

Nevertheless, the mission got completed and under the presidency of Professor Higuchi the National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry became a beacon for Psychiatry and Neurology with charisma and influence not only in Japan and Asia, but worldwide. The Max-Planck Institute in Munich is much smaller, but there we reached out for the same: Clinician scientists must work on eyesight with basic scientists. They must learn to articulate research questions evolving at the bedside in a way that allows translation into such experimental designs that have high prospect of success.

Along that common path, Professor Higuchi and I joined forces and formalized the collaboration between the NCNP in Tokyo and the MPI in Munich.

We not only formalized this in writing but filled it with life: Students, Postdocs were exchanged, we published together and enjoyed a number of joint science conferences:

The last one, two years ago in Japan, the next in 2017 in Munich.

I was selfish enough to ask, if Professor Higuchi would accept an appointment as member of the scientific advisory board of the MPI in Munich.

And despite all his commitments related to his presidency of the NCNP, many committees of the government and medical societies and on top his membership of the Science Council of Japan, Teruhiko Higuchi was willing to join our board.

He brought much of the spirit from the NCNP to our Institute in Munich. Importantly, the success of places like the NCNP in Tokyo and the MPI in Munich can be ascribed to style in leadership. That is to replace the classic imperative top-down style by a modern style where you give clear rules and examples and rely on self-learning processes.

The path to success can be a bumpy one, but Higuchi achieved the goal. He owes that achievement his personal style that combines strength and commitment with exquisite politeness, humor and charm.

Aside his extraordinary leadership, Professor Higuchi never forgot that leadership also requires a deep understanding of the science that is conducted. As a clinician scientist, Professor Higuchi's starting point has always been related to observations at the clinical wards. He has the talent to closely follow new technical developments in biomedicine and quickly found ways to use them to answer clinical questions.

Professor Higuchi authored numerous important publications covering different aspects of our field ranging from neurobiology to patient care.

The latter field is the one around everything revolves: Our patients which suffer so much and are waiting. Therefore, despite all his duties as manager, administrator and scientist Teruhiko Higuchi never forgot to care for his patients designed and conducted treatment schedules and made medical rounds educating residents.

All these qualifications and achievements rank Professor Higuchi among the great leaders in our field.

That is also reflected by the decision of the Price Committee awarding the Golden Kraepelin Medal. The committee unanimously accepted my proposal to award the Golden Kraepelin Medal to Professor Teruhiko Higuchi in 2014. On this list of honor you find Manfred Bleuler, Kurt Schneider, Jules Angst and the Nobel laureate Arvid Carlsson. Thus, Professor Higuchi is in very good company.

Now Professor Higuchi is passing the NCNP like a burning torch to Professor Mizusawa. He and Professor Takeda, Professor Nakagome and Mr Tomisawa and his team have arranged the transition so adorable and esteeming which illustrates their highest appreciation.

I started my laudation with a glimpse to the past and commitment to tradition. Now, looking into the future of the NCNP with Professor Higuchi as Honorary President, I can predict that the lesson of the great English statesman Thomas More is understood:

“Tradition is not preservation of the ashes, but handing over the flame”

Among all accomplishments this is a particularly daunting task and achieved by only a few. Professor Higuchi and his team have also managed this in an outstanding way, which guarantees that the NCNP will continue to flourish.

Behind a successful man, there is a wise and supportive woman and we all agree that Mrs. Higuchi deserves a share of the pride.

Dear Teruhiko, be assured that the elite of Western Psychiatry has a clear picture of what you have achieved for our field. I am deeply touched and thankful having had the honor to speak to you today on that occasion. I personally admire you as a great colleague and close friend.