The recent 2002 publication of the results of the Women’s Health Initiative (WHI),\textsuperscript{1} reporting the early termination of the estrogen-progestin arm of that randomized trial, has called into question some of the presumed benefits, and may well change the perceived risk : benefit ratio. This randomized controlled primary prevention trial involving 16,608 healthy post-menopausal women concluded with the following statement: “Results from WHI indicate that the combined post-menopausal hormones, conjugated equine estrogens (CEE) 0.625 mg/day and medroxyprogesterone acetate (MPA) 2.5 mg/day, should not be initiated or continued for the primary prevention of coronary heart disease. In addition, the substantial risks for cardiovascular disease and breast cancer must be weighed against the benefit for fracture in selecting from the available agents to prevent osteoporosis.”

In addition, the publication of another large randomized clinical trial — the Heart and Estrogen/Progestin Replacement Study (HERS) and its follow-up (HERS II) have been reported as providing new and shocking information on Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).\textsuperscript{2,3} These two major studies have put post-menopausal HRT as preventive strategy into a new perspective. These clinical studies resulted in a major shift in the recommendation on HRT to alternative medicine such as herbal medicine (Kampo medicine) in the United States and elsewhere.

On the other hand, our daily lives have been modernized in many aspects over the past century, as represented by advances in computerized telecommunication networks, computerized control of traffic systems and widespread use of electronic devices at home. These advances, however, have been accompanied by exposure of people to significant mental and physical stress in daily lives, making mental and physical dysfunction more likely to develop than before. The present age can therefore be characterized by the high likelihood for people to develop diseases primarily involving functional disorders (e.g. indefinite complaints). However, modern medicine has been divided into numerous small fields primarily by target organs and usually judges morphological and quantitative abnormalities of the human body in accordance with criteria based on mean values. As a result, disturbed functioning of the body is often difficult to diagnose or treat with modern medicine, and it is sometimes not viewed as an illness.

Western pharmacotherapy which is now the major medical modality in Japan is complemented by Kampo medicine. It should be noted that herbs are believed to affect both the psyche and the soma, and Kampo medicine does not differentiate between them. An improvement brought about by herbal medicine is usually mild and slow, although in some cases can be very dramatic.\textsuperscript{4} In Japan, Kampo medicine is often not counted as a form of alternative medicine, and it is not uncommon that Kampo medicine is administered as a therapy of first choice during routine clinical practices.
What is expected of medicine in the 21st century is medicine tailored to individuals and medicine which brings peace of mind to individuals, making use of latest medical information and technology. Needless to say, this is the central concept of holistic medicine. To put this idea into practice, mental and physical information (including Sho according to the theory of Kampo medicine) needed for diagnosis and treatment of individual patients should be collected, making use not only of blood samples and diagnostic images but also of the five senses of humans (basic concept of Kampo medicine), as shown in Fig. 1. In this respect, we may say that Kampo medicine now serves as a new form of medicine although it has a long history.

Fig. 1. Concepts of Modern Western Medicine and Kampo Medicine and Adequate Combination of Both Medical Approaches in Practical Medical Care.

Kampo medicine is more effective in the present age (characterized by a stressful and aging society, and an increased prevalence of combined diseases) than at any time in the past. The current global trend for adopting Kampo medicine is primarily based on the recent significant actions and movements made by people who desire to receive holistic medicine. We physicians should learn through Kampo medicine (a system of medicine that has prevailed for decades in the Oriental world) what is expected of medicine in the present age.

References
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