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brain dead in the country, the number of such organ donations remains small in Japan.

Cases of brain-dead patients certified for organ donations have totaled 584 since the first operation under the organ transplant law was carried out on Feb. 28, 1999, two years after the legislation came into force, according to the Japan Organ Transplant Network. But the number of people waiting for organ transplants totaled 13,530 at the end of January.

As a result of the backlog, potential recipients, their family members and others are

Michikata Okubo, who heads a nonprofit organization promoting medical transplants. Japan's first heart transplant was conducted at a hospital in Sapporo in 1968. But the procedure came under criticism due to the manner in which the donating individual was determined to be brain dead, a controversy that slowed the nation's progress in the transplant field. In the first case of its kind in 1999, a woman in her 40s at a hospital in Kochi was declared brain dead under the new law. Her organs, including the heart and liver, were used for transplants. Despite the ground-



**An organ transplant operation involving a girl who was declared brain dead is conducted at Okayama University Hospital in February 2016.** OKAYAMA UNIVERSITY / VIA KYODO

breaking procedure, the annual number of organ donors ranged between just three and 13 until the law was revised in 2010, which eased the rules governing the practice. The revised law enabled transplants with

the approval of family members even if the wishes of those declared brain dead were unclear. The number of donors has since increased, with 32 in 2010 and 76 in 2017, before falling to 68 last year.

# Barrier-free tourism trend gaining traction as nation grays

## ◆ Focus

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Universal tourism, or tourism accessible to all people regardless of age, nationality, disability and other factors that may discourage leisurely travel, is starting to gain wider recognition in graying Japan.

SPI (Japan) Inc. arranges universal tours conducted by so-called travel helpers, or people who have nursing-care skills and a basic knowledge of travel-related services.

Kozue Miyazawa, 61, one of the company's travel helpers, assisted an 84-year-old person named Sato on a trip to Katsushika Shibamata Torasan Museum in Tokyo's Katsushika Ward in September last year.

Sato, who has dementia and lives in a nursing home in Tokyo, began to use SPI's service three or four times a month about a year ago. Sato's son pays for the service.

After the visit to the museum, Sato, who was in a wheelchair pushed by Miyazawa, went to the banks of the Arakawa River to see the dry riverbed at dusk before eating sashimi and *unajū* (grilled eel on rice) at a restaurant near Shibamata Station.



**People in wheelchairs participate in a tour of Meiji Shrine, in central Tokyo.** KYODO

according to the National Institute of Population and Social Research. The group is forecast to account for 33.3 percent of the nation's population in 2036. A law aimed at eliminating discrimination against people with disabilities took effect in 2016.

Given the age demographics, demand for universal tourism is expected to increase.

In 2017, the government announced the Universal Design 2020 Action Plan to promote barrier-free train stations and other facilities. Last year the Japan Tourism Agency prepared a manual on the "barrier-free mindset" to help workers at hotels and other tourism facilities eliminate discrimination and prejudice against people with disabilities and the elderly, and to be friendlier to them.

Stressing the importance of a barrier-free mentality, Hiroyuki Murata, a specially appointed professor at the Institute of Development, Aging and Cancer of Tohoku University, said, "Japan is moving forward in terms of hardware but lagging in awareness and consciousness."

To foster such a mindset, grassroots efforts are necessary, said Hozumi Tanaka of ANA Sales Co., which is promoting universal tourism.

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