

# The World's Oldest Practicing Pharmacist

**At a pharmacy in Tokyo, one woman has been working for over 70 years as a pharmacist. In November 2018, Hiruma Eiko was certified as the oldest practicing pharmacist by Guinness World Records.**

**SASAKI TAKASHI**

**H**IRUMA Eiko was born in 1923 in Ikebukuro, Tokyo, and is now 97 years old. 1923 was the year Tokyo was devastated by the Great Kanto earthquake. In that same year, Hiruma's father opened a pharmacy.

Hiruma grew up watching her father work at the pharmacy, and decided to follow the same path. She entered Tokyo Pharmaceutical School for Women (present-day Meiji Pharmaceutical University) at the age of 18. She became a qualified pharmacist in 1944, and began helping her family's pharmacy business in the middle of the Second World War. The war intensified, and two days after she was evacuated from Tokyo to the countryside in March 1945, large parts of Tokyo were destroyed in the "Great Tokyo Air Raid." The family's pharmacy was also destroyed by the fire.

After the war ended that August, Hiruma returned to Tokyo. She felt that she had been given the opportunity to live and decided to continue to work as a pharmacist for as long as she lives. Approximately

All photos: Courtesy of Hiruma Eiko



Working at the pharmacy

three years after the end of the war she resumed her work. She tirelessly stood behind the pharmacy counter from nine in the morning until seven in the evening, Monday through Saturday.

As a pharmacist, Hiruma has always placed an emphasis on customers' feelings. Immediately following the end of the war, all goods were in short supply and the top priority was food and clothing, not medicine. Even when people felt slightly ill, they had more important things to worry about than consulting a doctor. In these circumstances, people needing help visited Hiruma's pharmacy. She treated these customers, sincerely consulting with them as much as possible. She was willing to listen to them, sometimes as another human, not as a pharmacist, about the problems in their lives. She has always made sure to say words that cheer up the customer. This stance did not change, even after Japan's affluence increased during its era of high economic growth.

Hiruma says, "Even now, in this materially affluent

society, there are many people who are physically or mentally ill. My determination to be considerate of customers' feelings has not wavered, now or in the past." Hiruma says the number of people to whom she has offered words of encouragement over her more than 70 years working as a pharmacist must be close to the population of a large city.

Having supported her father and taken over the family business, Hiruma continues to work as a pharmacist now with the support of her family. Her grandson Kojiro, the fourth generation of the family to run the pharmacy, proposed she apply to Guinness World Records to be certified as the oldest practicing pharmacist. She dismissed her grandson's suggestion out of hand, saying, "I am only doing what comes naturally for a pharmacist. Applying for recognition is absurd." However, later she changed her mind, thinking that if she were to be certified by Guinness World Records, it might help more people to understand the role pharmacists play and encourage more people to continue to work into old age.

Kojiro first reached out to Guinness World Records about 10 years ago, when Hiruma was 88 years old. However, the record holder at that time was a 92-year-old pharmacist in South Africa. On November 23, 2018, Hiruma became the Guinness World Record holder at 95 years and 17 days old.

In 2020, Hiruma injured her foot, requiring her to use a wheelchair. Taking a temporary leave from work, she devoted her time to rehabilitation, and became able to move around with walking aids. This spring, she posted on Twitter to say that she would do her best to return to work. The thing that motivated her to work on her rehabilitation was her desire to stand behind the counter as a pharmacist again.

"I am going to do my best and work as a practicing pharmacist until I am 100 years old," Hiruma says with determination.

Being there for everyone who visits the pharmacy is the way Hiruma Eiko lives her life. And now, she means to stand up once again to achieve it. **U**



Hiruma and her family after becoming the Guinness World Record holder