

Thoughts on Horiba's Medical Equipment Business



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January next year will mark the 50th anniversary of Horiba's inception. I find it very significant that this issue presents a comprehensive survey of Horiba's medical technology and products at this time.

The history of Horiba's endeavor in medical analysis goes back to Dr. Masao Horiba's development of a katharometer that employed the nondispersive infrared analysis method. Ironically, this technology did not bear fruit in the field of medicine. Instead, it was developed for use in the fields of industrial process and environmental testing, and in particular, its application to engine exhaust gas analysis formed the current foundation of Horiba's business.

In the field of medical technology, the katharometer was followed by the development of products that measured the concentration of sodium, potassium, and chloride ions in blood based on pH meter technology, the backbone product upon which our company founded its business. However, the appearance of large-scale testing instruments saw these measurement functions incorporated into a single instrument, and thus these products, which had been developed for the predicted advent of a small-instrument market, failed to bring about an expansion of business.

Nevertheless, rebuilding our medical equipment business was a dream that we had held for many years, and it was also imperative that we develop this field from a strategic perspective in order to expand Horiba's scope of business.

Fifteen years ago we first met with ABX, and the journey from technology introduction to the entry of ABX into the Horiba Group in 1996 can be regarded as the result of Horiba's strong desire for success in the field of medical technology. Our alliance with ABX was based on a common business concept and interest in the medical technology field, and provided an encounter with the compact, affordable, wide-use hematology analyzer technology and products that are essential for the future global market. The rapid growth of our group's medical technology business during the past five years is a result of the acceptance of our products in the small-instrument market (called point-of-care market) that we had targeted, and we have now attained a 25% share of the world market for compact hematology analyzers.

Needless to say, this success results from the achievement of high quality through a fusion of Horiba's manufacturing technology with ABX's ability to develop compact, distinctive product technology. Unique products combining a CRP analyzer with a hematology analyzer, which were born of the needs of Japanese clinical practice, have made a big contribution.

Looking at this fast-paced development of operations from a business perspective, it is apparent that there are many points that are instructive, such as what is demanded of research and development, and what needs to be done.

Among points that bear mention, firm resolve on the part of management is naturally important, as well as a focus of attention on the market and technology by those involved in product development, forward-looking marketing and product concepts for the purpose of entering an existing market, technical prowess that would enable us to achieve this goal, and at the same time flexible thinking about development and production technology alliances to supplement weaknesses and mutually take advantage of strengths, and the establishment of an environment where people of different cultures and countries could pursue research and development with the same spirit.

During discussions in a conference room at ABX in Montpellier on our next stage of product development — which will bring even bigger dreams to reality in our medical technology business — I thought about the fact that the foundation of product development is not something that is limited to medical technology; it is the same in every field. I thought about the excellence of the Horiba Group, which can take advantage of development environments throughout the world, and the fact that my own calling has been to engage in the development of many types of technology and products. I hope to have the opportunity in the future to talk in depth with young engineers about dreams for product development.