Femtech Round Table
—Toray’s Initiatives toward Femtech

Toray and Femtech
In recent years, with women entering the workforce and marrying later in life, issues related to women’s health, such as menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth, fertility treatment, and menopause, are now discussed as social issues, and with this rapidly changing awareness in society are driving the expansion of the femtech market. Femtech, a term coined by combining the words “female” and “technology,” refers to products and services that address women’s health and lifestyle concerns. Toray participates in the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry’s (METI) Femtech Demonstration Projects Supporting the Health and Continued Employment of Working Women in a four-company*1 partnership, and in tandem with that, in June 2022 launched the Blue Moon Project with the aim of enabling women to be themselves and shine throughout their lives with the power of new materials and technology. A strategy team, consisting of a total of 20 members, seven of whom are women selected from internal applicants as well as theme proposers (the majority of them are male), work concurrently with their regular duties as employees to take on the challenge of creating businesses around the three axes: digital wellness, reproductive health, and collaboration with leading customers and CX value enhancement. As an example, the team is currently working on the concept verification of a concept for a communication app which will support women with their physical pain and anxiety, which are difficult to express outwardly, within the framework of a METI demonstration project.

*1 ASKA Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd., Next Innovation Inc., Premier Wellness Science Co., Ltd., and Toray
*2 A condition that reduces labor productivity due to health problems, but not as severe as taking a sick leave

—What motivated you to apply for the Blue Moon Project?
Sakamoto I was genuinely interested in the project as I had seen femtech products often in Instagram posts and when I was shopping. Another reason was that I wanted to take on a challenge that went beyond the silos of my own department.
Ishibashi I’ve been a member of the back office since I joined the Company, but I also wanted to be involved in creating something if the opportunity arose. Also, the fact that I myself suffered from gynecological problems when I was younger is another reason. The dual role is hard, but I decided to participate in this project, as so many people cheered me on.

Asanuma I thought there would be a lot to gain from this project as I’m in the medical device business. And it seemed to me that I could contribute to the care of female employees in the same situation, based on my own experience with problems unique to women. Furthermore, felt supportive of the idea of this project to utilize the full array of Toray resources to create something new.
Qin I belong to the BSF (battery separator films) Division, and I applied because I have always been interested in health issues to the extent that people think I’m a health geek. Being a Chinese national, I want to contribute to solving the problems of working women from a non-Japanese perspective as well.
Shionoya It all started with a casual conversation, in which I told my boss about the launch of my own business when I was a student and that I wanted to try my hand at creating a business from scratch at Toray. Given that, I was the first to be invited by my boss to join this project.

—Please introduce some of the work you have done through this project.
Sakamoto The Reproductive Health Team conducts interviews and online surveys to select topics that we should tackle, such as endometriosis, morning sickness, and postpartum depression.
Ishibashi The Digital Wellness Team is working on analyzing competing apps and exploring collaboration opportunities.
Asanuma We are examining solutions to address pain and conducting research on reproductive health.
Qin We are considering absorbent underpants and new forms of sanitary products.
Shionoya We have outlined a plan for “pain communication” and currently discussing marketing and monetization.

—What are your thoughts and feelings working on this project?
Sakamoto I’m very excited to see how collaborating with other companies can give us such new perspectives,
Miki Kasabo is responsible for healthcare business planning to support health and medical care. She joined the Company in 1996, and gained factory experience at the Seta Plant, where she was involved in product development utilizing functional fibers. Since 2008, she has been involved in the promotion of Life Cycle Management (LCM) and promoted the development of environmentally-friendly products and the introduction of environmental analysis tools. In 2018, she was transferred to the Tokyo Head Office, where she currently serves.

Value Creation Strategy

and it makes me feel that it’s possible to set our sights on realizing a wide range of businesses. I also want to be able to act first and find something without limiting my own possibilities.

Ishibashi There is a lively exchange of ideas and opinions that I would not have thought of myself, and I learn a lot, especially from the younger members. The generation gap is rather refreshing, and I’m impressed that the project is coming to life through the power of young people.

Asanuma For Toray, femtech is not a topic on a distant horizon, and I feel that it should be one of Toray’s strengths. I also learned anew the breadth of Toray’s business fields, contacts, and collaborations, and the broad perspective and connections I gained were for me extremely meaningful. I intend to apply them to my activities in my own workplace.

Qin I’m amazed at the number of women’s health issues that keep cropping up that I was not aware of before. On the other hand, I also feel firsthand how difficult it is to create new businesses.

Shionoya I remember starting up an advertising business when I was a student, and I find it interesting to think up a business from scratch. However, since this is a business that Toray will be involved in, we would like it to be a business that not only makes profit, but also influential enough to leave an impact on society.

— What kind of company do you want Toray to become in the future as a result of this project?

Sakamoto Many Toray employees are talented and have interesting ideas, so I think it’s important to enhance the foundation upon which we can take advantage of such strengths.

Ishibashi I hope a better internal environment will be created in which every individual can make the most of his or her strengths, that horizontal ties will become more active and extend beyond the boundaries of divisions, and that it will become commonplace for employees to freely and openly express their ideas and opinions.

Asanuma I would be happy if the situation of presenteeism among working women improves, and to see that a culture of mutual support and relying on each other, regardless of gender, permeates Toray.

Qin I hope that this project will make this Company a more comfortable workplace for women and that it will encourage them to venture further and further into unexplored fields.

Shionoya Toray is often seen as a conservative company, especially by younger people. We will do our utmost to make this project a success, believing that it will dispel such an image and change the way people see us, namely, into a company that is full of dreams and challenges.

Kasabo The goal of the project is to provide a system that helps users to become more aware of their pre-symptomatic conditions and to guide them in the right direction by providing support for their physical pain and anxieties that they may not be able to express. Today, Toray’s business is to sell materials to consumer goods manufacturers, but the Company aims to establish contact with end-users through pain communication and other means by around 2030, and leverage the information obtained to provide better quality materials and products on a sustainable basis.

In addition, Toray is also looking to improve its corporate value from various angles, such as by ecosystem formation through reusable napkins from a CSV/SDGs business perspective, and contributing to work style reform and improvements to productivity for female employees around the world by bringing femtech to factories. I believe that such a concept cannot be realized by Toray alone, and it is essential to collaborate with the government and partner companies. My role is to find ways to have the unique characters of the project members shine through and resonate. Ultimately, I hope that this will be a step toward creating an environment in which society as a whole can address unseen health problems, for both men and women.

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