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Nagoya Final Report



"Itadakimasu." Itadakimasu was one of the first words I learned while participating in the *Bridging Community Medicine and Innovations in Japan* summer program. The phrase translates to "I humbly receive" and is traditionally said before a meal to express sincere gratitude for the food, the people who prepared it, and everyone whose efforts made the meal possible. As I reflect on this summer program, that same sense of gratitude comes to mind. I leave Japan feeling thankful not only for what I learned about medicine, but also for the people I met, the experiences I shared, and the new perspectives I gained.

One of our first experiences in Nagoya was learning about the Japanese healthcare system. We discussed how healthcare is organized in Japan and compared it with the system in the United States. I then had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Takahashi, a general practitioner in Nagoya, who shared valuable insights into the challenges facing primary care in Japan. He explained that many physicians and patients are concentrated in large hospitals, while fewer healthcare providers practice in community and rural settings. This imbalance is becoming increasingly unsustainable as Japan's population continues to age and more people express a desire to spend their final days at home rather than in a hospital. With a limited number of physicians serving rural communities, providing accessible home-based care will become an even greater challenge in the years ahead. Throughout the week, we continued to revisit this issue and discussed what we hoped the Japanese healthcare system could look like over the next decade.



One way I believe we can help address the shortage of general practitioners is by providing more experiences like the one this program offered in Gifu Prefecture. This was my favorite part of the program because it introduced us to a more rural, community-centered, and culturally rich side of Japan. We stayed at the Kagayaki Clinic in the Mino Branch and participated in home visits alongside the physicians there. During one visit, I met a patient living with multiple system atrophy and her devoted husband. Seeing her in her home environment allowed me to appreciate the importance of Japan's home healthcare system and how essential it is for patients with complex, chronic illnesses. It also highlighted the meaningful relationships that develop between physicians, patients, and families through longitudinal care.

After our home visits, we worked in groups to apply the biopsychosocial model, which emphasizes caring for the whole person rather than simply treating a disease. We discussed each patient's physical, psychological, and social needs while considering what brought meaning and happiness to their lives. During this experience, I also learned the Japanese concept of *ikigai*, often translated as "a reason for being." It describes the sense of purpose, joy, and fulfillment that motivates someone to live each day. Observing this patient's care and reflecting on her story helped me understand how medicine extends beyond diagnoses and treatments. I saw firsthand the fulfillment experienced by those who dedicate their careers to caring for aging populations, and I hope to carry many of those values into my own future practice.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Nagoya this summer. One of the biggest surprises was how many meaningful friendships I formed with students from Nagoya University School of Medicine. The Japanese students were incredibly welcoming, kind, and eager to learn from us, just as we were eager to learn from them. Our conversations extended far beyond medicine as we shared our cultures, experiences, and perspectives on healthcare and everyday life. Everyone was genuinely curious about how things were done outside of their own country, creating an environment of mutual respect and learning. The friendships and connections I made were just as valuable as the academic experiences, and I am grateful that the program was intentionally designed to foster those relationships. As I think back on my time in Japan, I can only say, “Itadakimasu”—with deep gratitude for everything this experience has given me.

