

Name: Arvind Rajan

Home Institution: UNC School of Medicine, USA (Fourth Year)

Laboratory visited on the first day: Tumor Pathology Lab, Nagoya University

Participating in the Bridging Community Medicine and Innovations in Japan program was an incredible experience that gave me the opportunity to see how Japan integrates community-based care with cutting-edge medical technology. I am deeply thankful to the professors, students, and staff who made this program so meaningful. It was both academically enriching and personally transformative.

On the first day, I met fellow students from the U.S. and China, and we shared our perspectives on how medicine differs across countries. We were also introduced to Japanese medical students, who gave us an insightful lecture on Japan's healthcare system. Comparing healthcare models across nations sparked thought-provoking discussions about strengths and challenges in each system. I appreciated how the program encouraged group work with students from different countries, which allowed me to form lasting connections with peers from Japan and China.

We toured Nagoya University Hospital, which showcased impressive medical technologies, and we received a warm welcome from the deans and faculty. Later, I joined Gareth, a student from China, in the Tumor Pathology Lab, where we were hosted by Dr. Atsushi Enomoto. Dr. Enomoto gave us an excellent lecture on the role of meflin in fibrosis within the cancer microenvironment, a topic that resonated with me given my interest in oncology. He also gifted us Japanese cover sheets with ukiyo-e-style illustrations overlaid with modern scientific symbols such as CRISPR-Cas9. Meeting the other members of his lab was equally memorable, as they were warm and welcoming. The next day, we had the opportunity to create traditional herbal medicines, practiced acupuncture techniques, and explored surgical simulation technologies in the digital XR lab. These opportunities provided a balance of traditional practices and modern innovations, which I found especially fascinating.

Our visit to the Kagayaki Clinic in Gifu was perhaps the most formative part of the program. Traveling from Nagoya to stay at the clinic for one night allowed us to immerse ourselves in its day-to-day operations. We joined home visits with physicians who cared for patients unable to attend the clinic, and it was an honor to be welcomed into their homes. This model of physician-led home visits, uncommon in the U.S., struck me as a deeply patient-centered approach. Spending time at the clinic also gave me a stronger sense of the relationships between providers and the community, leaving a lasting impression on me as a future physician. A particularly moving visit was to the Come Come Swallow Cafe, where innovative approaches improved quality of life for patients with dysphagia. By creating visually realistic meals safe for swallowing, patients could eat alongside their families, preserving dignity and connection.

Beyond clinical learning, the program fostered cultural immersion. From wearing yukatas in Mino to watching traditional fishing by sunset, these moments created cherished memories with classmates. We also explored Nagoya Castle and other landmarks, which broadened my appreciation of Japanese culture. Equally important was the involvement of the Japanese medical students, who genuinely wanted to get to know us and make us feel at home. Their kindness and eagerness to build friendships left me feeling as though I had made lifelong friends.

The program concluded with group presentations and a farewell reception, where my group created a video compiling our shared experiences. Seeing everything we had learned and accomplished in one week was deeply rewarding. Our final dinner together was a fitting end to a transformative program that balanced academic, cultural, and personal growth. I am immensely grateful to the professors, staff, and Japanese students who supported us throughout the program. Their hospitality made us feel welcome in a new country and allowed us to form meaningful connections. I highly recommend this program to future students, as it offers a unique chance to experience the intersection of community medicine, innovation, and cultural exchange in Japan.