

EXPERIENCE REPORT

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My Immersive Journey at Nagoya University's Summer Program 2025: Where Innovation Meets Tradition

From July 7-14, 2025, I had the extraordinary privilege of participating in Nagoya University Graduate School of Medicine's summer program, "Bridging Community Medicine and Innovations in Japan." This meticulously designed program offered a perfect blend of academic rigor, clinical exposure, and cultural immersion, giving me unparalleled insights into Japan's world-class healthcare system. What made this experience truly exceptional was how every activity - from hospital tours to rural clinic visits - interconnected to showcase Japan's holistic approach to medicine. What made it even more special were the genuine connections formed along the way - the warm conversations with Japanese colleagues over matcha, the late-night case discussions with American peers, and those unplanned moments of laughter that turned strangers into lifelong friends.

1. Academic Foundations: Understanding Japan's Healthcare System

The program began with Dr. Hitoki Hasegawa's comprehensive orientation, setting the stage for our week-long exploration. One of the most enlightening sessions was the "Overview of Japanese Healthcare System" lecture, where we analyzed Japan's universal insurance system, including the tiered copayment structure (30% for ages 6-69, decreasing for seniors). This policy's balance between accessibility and sustainability sparked lively discussions among international participants. The orientation and subsequent discussions led me to conclude that Japan's system demonstrates how policy design can ensure both universal coverage and cost control---- a model many nations could learn from.

2. Cutting-Edge Medical Technology at Nagoya University Hospital

At the Medical xR Center, directed by Dr. Koki Nakanishi, we experienced revolutionary virtual reality applications in surgical training. The xR technology left an indelible impression on me, particularly how seamlessly it blended cutting-edge innovation with practical medical applications. What astonished me most wasn't just the technological sophistication itself, but how intuitively these virtual reality systems replicated real surgical scenarios. I tried the VR gallbladder removal simulation, which provided haptic feedback so realistic I could "feel" tissue resistance. This technology's potential to reduce medical errors while allowing unlimited practice was astounding. The implications for surgical training globally are profound, and I can't help but imagine how such technology could revolutionize medical education back at my home institution. Most remarkably, even amidst these technological marvels, the human element remained central - the instructors emphasized how these tools ultimately serve to enhance, not replace, the physician's tactile expertise and clinical judgment.

Also, we had a wonderful operation room visit. The OR tour revealed Japan's meticulous approach to surgical safety. I observed how their "time-out" protocol involved every team member verbally confirming critical information - a simple yet powerful practice I plan to advocate for at my home institution.

3. Gastroenterology Immersion: Clinical and Research Perspectives

In the lab visit part, I chose my major department---gastroenterology. My most anticipated segment was the gastroenterology rotation under Dr. Yamamoto's guidance. In the endoscopy suite, I observed emergency hemostasis for a post-pancreatectomy bleed using novel over-the-scope clips, the presentation of small bowel enteroscopy with the latest motorized spiral technology and EUS-guided procedures demonstrating remarkable precision. My clinical observations extended to the gastroenterology ward rounds, where Dr. Yamamoto generously took time to explain the nuanced differences from my hospital's ward system back in China.

The basic research lab visit was equally rewarding. One of the most unexpectedly heartwarming moments came when I encountered two Chinese graduate students from Nagoya Medical School in the basic research lab. With incredible generosity, they spent the afternoon walking me through their groundbreaking work on fibroblast-epithelial cell interactions in IBD - research that coincidentally offered fresh perspectives for my own project back home. As the formal tour concluded, these kindred spirits became impromptu campus guides, showing me hidden gems like the medical library's rare book collection and the state-of-the-art instrumentation facility. During the discussions and laugh, I realized this was the program's magic -----where professional learning and personal connections became beautifully intertwined. My deepest gratitude extends not just to Dr. Yamamoto and his brilliant gastroenterology team, but to these two remarkable researchers who turned a routine lab visit into one of my most cherished memories. Their mentorship exemplified the collaborative spirit that makes Nagoya's medical community truly special.

4. Kagayaki Clinic: The Heart of Japanese Community Medicine

Our two-day immersion at Kagayaki Clinic, founded by the visionary Dr. Ryoichi Ichihashi, redefined my understanding of primary care.

My experience at Kagayaki Clinic fundamentally transformed my understanding of community healthcare. The children's rehabilitation center demonstrated Japan's exceptional commitment to special needs populations, with advanced anti-gravity training systems and land-based rehabilitation equipment designed for family participation - an approach that simultaneously improves patient outcomes and reduces caregiver burden.

The clinic's home medical care system left an even deeper impression. Their 24/7 response mechanism and interdisciplinary team approach (integrating doctors, nurses, and nutritionists) represents a gold standard in accessible, comprehensive care. Participating in home visits revealed the astonishing reality of hospital-level treatment being administered in residential settings - from ICU beds in living rooms to complex procedures like tracheostomy and ostomy care being managed at home. Witnessing terminal patients spending their final days surrounded by personal belongings rather than hospital equipment illustrated the profound humanity of this approach.

Also, it was my first time to know about the great "Come Come Swallow" Program. This innovative dysphagia meal program, where we prepared and tasted texture-modified dishes that maintained visual appeal and nutrition, showed how culinary science enhances quality of life. Through tasting the specially prepared meals at 'Come Come Swallow' and observing their meticulous preparation process, I gained profound appreciation for both the thoughtful intentions behind this program and its tremendous therapeutic value.

5. Cultural and Professional Exchange

I extend my deepest gratitude to all the professors at Nagoya University for the enlightening lectures, including traditional medicine seminar by Dr. Juichi Sato on Kampo herbs, medical ethics discussion on neonatal care dilemmas, cross-cultural case conferences comparing US, Japanese, and Chinese approaches. Through these lectures, role-playing exercises, and interactive discussions, I gained profound insights into Japanese traditional medicine and patient-centered care. Medicine knows no borders, and I firmly believe healthcare professionals worldwide share the same focus: combining global perspectives with compassionate care to safeguard human health.

6. Cultural Immersion: Treasured Memories

The program thoughtfully arranged immersive cultural experiences that became highlights of our journey. During the yukata dressing experience - my first time wearing this traditional summer garment - our group transformed as we strolled through Mino's historic udatsu-lined streets, the lightweight cotton fabric and intricate patterns connecting us to Japan's seasonal traditions.

But nothing compared to the magical Nagara River evening. As our wooden boat glided at sunset, we shared traditional cuisine while laughter and conversations sparkled like the water's reflection. Then came the unforgettable ukai cormorant fishing - flames dancing on the river as master fishermen and their birds demonstrated a 1,300-year-old harmony between humans and nature. That firelit spectacle, where skill and tradition merged seamlessly against the backdrop of Mino's famous washi paper lanterns, will forever symbolize Japan's timeless wisdom in my memory.

As this transformative journey comes to a close, my heart is filled with profound appreciation for everyone who made this experience so extraordinary. To Nagoya University - thank you for opening your doors and sharing your innovative medical vision. Special gratitude to Dr. Hitoki Hasegawa for his inspiring leadership, Dr. Itzel Bustos for her tireless coordination, and Dr. Chizuki Miyagawa for ensuring every detail was perfect. To the extraordinary physicians who enlightened us - Dr. Yamamoto (gastroenterology), Dr. Ryoichi Ichihashi (community medicine), Dr. Koki Nakanishi (XR technology), Dr. Ueda (neonatal ethics), Dr. Sato (Kampo medicine), Dr. Umegaki (geriatric care) and more - your patience in teaching and passion for medicine have set lifelong examples. To all the brilliant participants from Japan, the U.S. and beyond - our late-night discussions, cultural exchanges, and shared laughter turned strangers into a global medical family.

This summer has gifted me not just knowledge, but cherished memories and friendships that transcend borders. Though we may scatter across the world, the lessons learned under Nagoya's sun will continue to guide me.

Until our paths cross again - どうもありがとうございました！ May your important work continue to flourish, and may we all meet again in the pursuit of healing.

