

Carlos Manuel Melchor

UC Davis School of Medicine, Sacramento, California, United States (2024)

Laboratory Visited: Neurosurgery

The Prologue:

My experience during the Summer Program 2024 at Nagoya University Graduate School of Medicine was one filled both with excitement and nervousness - being a first-generation student from a family of immigrants, going to another country, let alone, due to my education seemed impossible and never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined the experience I got through this program. Realizing that I was going to be in Nagoya, I contacted my friend, Ikue-san, who I met during my time as an undergraduate student at California State University, Chico (Chico State), when she was an exchange student and now lived in Nagoya. I also contacted my friend, Taisuke-san, who I wrote about in my initial application to the Summer Program 2024 - he was my roommate during my time at Chico State, one of my really good friends, and although he currently does not live in Japan, his mother and brother do, whom I hadn't seen since 2019.

The Start of the Summer Program 2024 at Nagoya University Graduate School of Medicine:

My journey to the summer program began when I met Hasegawa-sensei, Kasai-san, and Kasai-san's daughter around 5 PM on July 7th, 2024 - Christi and I were sweaty, tired, and exhausted from the humidity and journey we had just taken with the Shinkansen from Tokyo to Nagoya. Little did I know the amazing experiences that awaited me. On my first day of the program, getting to learn more about the Japanese Healthcare System from Yusuke-san and Hitoshi-san was very informative - from realizing the pro's of the system compared to US Healthcare and unexpectedly, the con's of the system. Interestingly, it was also interesting how we also got to hear about the Chinese Healthcare system from our colleagues from Peking University in China, and how all three countries got together to give their thoughts and how to improve the Japanese Healthcare system and much later, present to everyone at the Kagayaki Clinic on how we can improve healthcare our respective country's healthcare system. One of my favorite parts of this whole experience was getting to connect with medical students from both Nagoya University and Peking University, and getting to learn more about them as people - this part of my experience began with Yuka-san, who along with Dr. Fuse from the Department of Neurosurgery, gave me a tour of the hospital and taught me how to suture using a microscope. Although Yuka-san was significantly better than me, I still did two knots! In two hours... but still! At the end of the day, the social event with MDEC Meidai Exchange Club was also a lot of fun; it was a great opportunity to meet more students and network over some yummy food! Dominoes in Japan is definitely better than the US.

The lectures on various topics continued onto Day 2, where I continued to learn about topics surrounding Geriatric Medicine and start-up companies, as well as a tour of the simulation center, where I was at the day before practicing suturing. I got the chance to practice laparoscopic suturing, where I once again competed with Yuka-san... except this time I won! This part of the experience was also a lot of fun, and it was great to learn more about the Virtual Reality capabilities of medical education, and seeing how Nagoya University is optimizing these technologies to train their physicians.

Day 3 was arguably one of my favorite days of the whole trip - the trip to Gifu, the Kagayaki Clinic, and the Ukai fishing. We started the day with an awesome introduction from Dr. Ichihashi - the concept of home healthcare. However, it wasn't until my shadowing experience with Dr. Shirakami, the nurse, and my colleague from Peking University, Wei, that I understood what this meant. Seeing Dr. Shirakami and the nurse interact with their patients was heartwarming and inspiring - despite the chronic conditions suffered by most of the patients, they are all very thankful - seeing the patients receive healthcare services within the walls of their

home is a concept that is unheard of in the US, but is very familiar in Mexico; when I shared this with my mom, who is from Zacatecas, Mexico, she shared with me that this too was a custom that physicians practiced back in the day when she lived there. My shadowing experience was further enriched by the unfortunate passing of a Kagayaki Clinic patient later that night around 10 PM - we were getting back home from the Ukai ceremony and the clinic was empty since everyone was at the bath; it was then that Dr. Ichihashi had told Zoya, Grace, and myself that a Kagayaki Clinic patient in Nagoya had passed away and that since the death certificate had to be confirmed by a physician, he was going to head out to Nagoya and offered to let us shadow. Despite the tiredness from the long day of traveling and shadowing, we enthusiastically tagged along - this was one of the most unique experiences I have ever seen and I will never forget it. Seeing Dr. Ichihashi's empathy and the gratitude from the patients was nothing short of amazing - I hope to practice that same level of empathy as a physician during moments of hardship with my patients. The social aspect of Day 3 was also really fun and unique; the bus ride to the CamCam Swallow restaurant and learning how they create daily foods for patients with swallowing deficits, the Ukai museum, and of course, the Ukai fishing itself. The Ukai fishing was such a unique experience and I am so fortunate to have gotten the opportunity to experience that. Once I arrived back to the Kagayaki Clinic after getting to shadow Dr. Ichihashi and the process of assigning a death certificate, I got the chance to socialize and get to learn more about some of my colleagues, now friends - specifically, Yuki-san, Wei, and Jocelyn. This memory of getting to learn more about them, their passion for medicine, and who they are over a drink (plus showing them how to make cocktails!) was commemorated to memory forever by the polaroid picture taken by Hitoshi-san using Wei's polaroid camera - Jocelyn and Wei gave me one to keep to remember this night by.

Day 4 of the program was awesome; getting the chance to visit a traditional Japanese town, Mino City, and getting to learn what students from the other two countries foresaw as their future in healthcare was inspiring (excluding Dr. Bustos' son thinking economic downfall for the Japanese Healthcare system... haha). It was great to get ideas from the other two countries as well - maybe I can assist in healthcare reformation back in the US. The lecture by Dr. Kikuya on home health dentistry and hearing how he helps geriatric patients with terminal conditions feel happy again by restoring their smile was an interesting approach to end-of-life care. Not to mention, his response in saying "I'm a professional" was also a really great response when asked by one of the students how he totally transformed a patient's smile. The dinner party later that day was one of my favorite memories and arguably one of the best meals I have ever had - please give my regards to the chef and ask her to share the name of the plate and/or recipe for the eggplant dish (see photo attached). Or all the meals she made that night for that matter! The yakiniku was also really good. By far one of the best dinner meals I have ever had, in-part, due to the amazing company I was surrounded with. As we concluded Day 4, I realized how truly special this program was - the unique opportunity to learn about Community-based Home Health while also getting the chance to learn more about other cultures and customs. The long train ride back home was a tough one - I didn't quite feel ready to conclude my time in Gifu; I honestly wish we would have stayed an additional day, but maybe the next cohort can?

The last day of the program, Day 5, arrived way too quick for my liking - it seemed like time had flown by way too quickly for my liking. I was excited to see what everyone from each country came up with and prepared for their presentation slides on what we learned from each other and how we planned to apply this to our healthcare systems back in our home countries. The day concluding with a case study was a great exercise to assess and utilize our clinical knowledge using our peers. The certificate ceremony and traditional Japanese dinner at the end was a bitter-sweet end to the 5-day long program; I am forever grateful for the people I met, including students from both Nagoya and China, the amazing faculty from both Nagoya and the US, and the awesome staff and administrators from both Nagoya University and the Kagayaki Clinic. I am excited to see

this program continue and I hope I can play a part in its continued success. I hope to be able to visit you all in Nagoya and Gifu sometime soon in the future, and return to volunteer at the Kagayaki Clinic as a physician.

The Epilogue:

Thank you all for the amazing opportunity to learn and get enriched into Japanese culture alongside our colleagues from China and the Eastern US. I am attempting efforts to implement what I learned about community medicine through Case Management services, a new initiative I am troubleshooting to implement at Knight's Landing One Health Center – a student-run clinic, where we are trying to meet patients where they are at, and offer them supports to the best of our ability, even in their own home. I will keep you all posted on how this initiative goes. This experience has enriched my perspective, and I hope to utilize it to propel myself to be a better physician for my patients and my community.



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“A predictable life is already as good as lived” – Dr. Ichihashi

“What remains after a person dies is not what they have gathered, but what they have given” – Dr. Ichihashi

