

Recognition of Distinction in Global Health

University of Alabama at Birmingham Heersink School of Medicine

Clinical Elective: Kyoto University Hospital 京大病院

Date of Training: 06-09-2025 to 07-04-2025

Student: Jared deGuzman

Date of Reflection: 08-30-2025



Having lived in Japan before, and specifically Kyoto, I had a few priorities and goals that I set for myself outside my clinical responsibilities before I left. Chief among these, and most important for me, was reconnecting with old friends while building a new community with my peers at Kyoto University. I truly believe that our greatest cause as world travelers and representatives of UAB Medicine is to build and maintain relationships that help to fortify the image and further the interests of ourselves and our institution. What I didn't expect, was how warm, welcoming, helpful and excited that the hospital and its staff would be to have us on board for the summer. Every doctor that I was paired with took time to go above and beyond to aid in both our learning and feeling of comfort. Whether it was translational help, or local recommendations, my thoughts never went unanswered. Along with excellent Japanese practice, those experiences shaped my international elective to be even more wonderful than I could have ever imagined.

With one of my primary goals being to reconnect with old friends, it didn't take more than a day for me to start visiting with them. Many of my friends from Kyotanabe, the city I used to teach English in, are Izakaya owners. Izakaya's are small restaurants, usually owned and operated by one person. Being the only foreigner that lived in Kyotanabe, I had piqued the interest of a couple such owners when I went out to eat after work, and those friendships blossomed over the year that I was there. Coming back, it only felt natural to visit them at the places we initially met, inside of their restaurants. The reunions were touching but sentiments were short-lived, soon it was like no time had passed and we were talking like we always had. It didn't take long for them to warm up to Shamar either, even speaking no Japanese, he quickly became a favorite among my friends and local patrons. As I like to say, birds of a feather flock together, or 類は友を呼ぶ.

Over the course of the month that we were there, they hosted private parties for us, took us on trips outside of Kyoto, and gave us plenty to do in the area where we lived. I can't express my gratitude enough to Global Health for the ability to see them again, and I can't thank them enough for the effort and support they gave us while we were there. またまもなく, I'll see you again soon.





My time in Kyoto, however, wasn't just about maintaining existing relationships, it was about creating new ones. Relationships that would benefit both myself, and the University, moving forward. Every physician that I had the pleasure of shadowing was kind enough to share their personal information, their local favorites, and their medical expertise. Some, in particular, went above and beyond to make us feel welcome. Some notable examples are 大鶴先生 (Dr. Ohtsuru) who took us out to a lovely dinner in Kyoto and even introduced us to his sons, who are both medical students looking to attend residency in the United States. And also 陣上先生 (Dr. Jingami) who gave us a personal tour of the hyperbaric oxygen center, then connected us with other physicians in the hospital who shared our specialties of interest, and made sure that we were able to meet with them and exchange contact information before we left.

Time and time again, I was met with unbridled and unconditional kindness from total strangers, some of them being well respected physician scientists and surgeons. While my previous experiences in Japan shouldn't leave me surprised, it still takes me aback a bit to think back, and reflect on it.

We didn't just meet physicians, however, and many of my most meaningful new relationships came from medical students and people entirely unrelated to Kyoto University at all. In our Emergency Medicine rotation, Shamar and I met a group of amazing 6th year medical students, a few of which were studying to take step 1 or step 2. Because of this, their English was much better than my Japanese, so they were able to take us around the hospital and help us communicate our interests more clearly. They also became very good friends that we're still in contact with, taking us to their favorite lunch spots, hanging out with us after hours, and teaching us useful Japanese, not the overly formal textbook Japanese that I'm used too.

Other organizations within Kyoto University were just as welcoming. For example, the international student's organization took us out for dinner, and the Kyoto University Club Volleyball team allowed me to come and practice with them while I was there, it was truly a wonderful experience.



I'm sure that I could write a separate PhD dissertation on the food in Japan. But as an amateur cook and self-proclaimed foodie, I can just tell you that it was amazing. All of the people that we met had their own recommendations and must-try's throughout the city, which left no shortage of food tourism to be had. I'm pretty sure that I have enough restaurants saved on apple maps for my next few trips to Kyoto. And I have plenty of recipes and local ingredients stuffed into my suitcase to keep me indulged for months.



Having lived in Japan before, I was registered and used their National Health Insurance Scheme. Getting to see the inter-workings of it was a new experience entirely. The Japanese system utilizes a monthly income-based pay system with bills that can be paid like utilities, at any convenience store or bank. So long as you pay on time, the government will cover 70% of any health-care related expenses with the user covering the remaining 30%. It's important to be vigilant and inquisitive in order to parse out a system's benefits and draw backs. One stark example of a drawback was that the head of our clinical oncology rotation, 松原先生 (Dr. Matsubara), estimated cancer treatments in Japan to be 5 to 7 years behind the US, as the government has to approve all new therapies before they're covered by their national insurance.

Some other interesting facts that I learned while I was there are: every doctor within a hospital system makes the same salary regardless of specialty, emergency physicians are also primary care physicians and ICU doctors, and other integrated health care specialties like physician assistants and nurse practitioners don't exist



This experience was transformative in so many ways, in the connections I made, the experiences I had, and my growth as a globally conscious physician. I feel blessed to have built so many new relationships and to have had the opportunity to maintain the relationships that I already made. My experiences in the hospital were far different than I could have ever expected, both in procedure and administration. There were so many vastly unique and subtle differences that shaped my idea of what healthcare could, and should, be. Overall, I took away from Kyoto exactly what I set out to. New friends, new knowledge, and a new perspective. If it all possible, I'll claw myself back there, one way or another.