

Recognition of Distinction in Global Health

University of Alabama at Birmingham Heersink School of Medicine

Clinical Elective: Taichung, Taiwan – Chung Shan Medical University

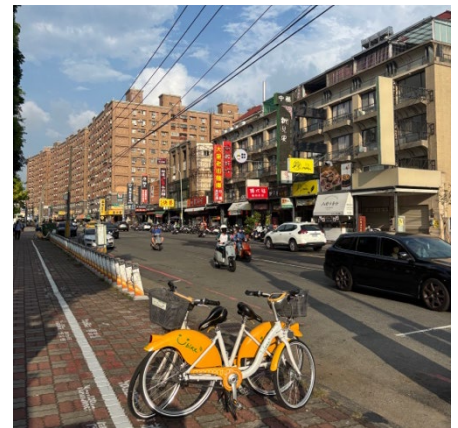
Date of Training: June 7, 2025 – July 6, 2025

Student: Joy Duan

Date of Reflection: September 5, 2025

When I stepped off the high-speed train, I couldn't see—my glasses had fogged over. My summer in Taichung, Taiwan can pretty much be summed up with one word: Warm. In the months leading up to my departure for Taichung, I checked the weather forecasts regularly, so when I arrived in Taichung in June, I was anticipating the weather. More than the summer humidity, though, it was the kindness and the friendliness of the people that made my summer so warm.

From the moment we reached Taichung, we were welcomed and cared for: Another CSMU student picked us up from the rail station to take us to our dorm for the month, where our program coordinator was waiting for us with bus passes and toilet paper—both very essential items we hadn't thought to buy yet. Our dorm was across from a high school on a lively street lined with 7-Elevens (three just within walking distance!) and food vendors (the gua bao stall was my personal favorite). The dorm was also located conveniently across the street from the bus station, which we waited at every morning to get to the Chung Shan Medical University Hospital.

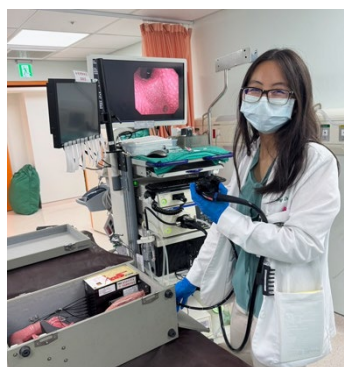


In the hospital, the physicians, residents, and local students were incredibly welcoming. We spent our first two weeks in the pediatrics department, where we saw many cases of *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*. Until this point, I had only ever read about *M. pneumoniae* from lecture slides, so it was challenging and fulfilling when the physician pipped me about antibiotics and chest x-ray findings. I



learned that the close living proximity of the Taiwanese population contributes to higher rates of *M. pneumoniae* and higher rates of macrolide resistance, so doxycycline is sometimes given if patients are infected with azithromycin-resistant strains. Antibiotic resistance is a problem many healthcare providers face around the world, so seeing how other physicians handle these situations was a valuable reminder that good health is a global effort, and we can all learn from our peers around the world.

Our attending physician also took us to the NICU, where I did my first ever cranial ultrasound on the sweetest, teeniest newborn. Even though I initially had no idea what I was looking at, it was meaningful to learn by doing and to know that I could have an impact on that little baby's care. Even more, it was interesting to discuss the differences in reasons for admission for pediatric patients in Taiwan versus the US: I learned that because Taiwan's National Health Insurance (NHI) makes healthcare so affordable, many parents take their children to the hospital just for fever or diarrhea. One of my personal interests in going to Taiwan was to see their NHI in action and learn how their healthcare system consequently provides differently than the US, so it was very fulfilling to see how in Taiwan, providing affordable and accessible care has translated to patients having a high level of trust in and willingness to seek healthcare.



We spent our last two weeks in the Gastroenterology department, which was equally fun. The residents we followed were incredibly kind and wonderful teachers, and through the many abdominal ultrasounds, liver biopsies, colonoscopies (which I even got to simulate!), and even a few endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatographies, I saw firsthand how multifaceted health is. For example, betel nut consumption is common in Taiwan and associated with higher rates of oral cancer than the US, where betel nut consumption is not culturally significant. The GI physicians explained their efforts to lower these rates with early screening and patient education, which I thought was an admirable lesson to take back home—

although oral cancer is not as prominent in the US, the principles of early detection and early intervention still apply.

The GI faculty were also fantastic, and from them, we learned that UAB and CSMU's partnership actually extends back 28 years. In 1997, Dr. Pittman, the former UABHSOM dean, visited Taichung to advise CSMU faculty on how to grow their medical school. Being part of this 28-year-long relationship really emphasized the importance of global partnerships, which provide such opportunities to learn from each other.



Inside and outside the hospital, we made many sweet friends. The other students in the pediatrics department were the definition of hospitable and friendly, and they took us exploring to the night market down the street from CSMU (sweet potato balls are life-changing!), Din Tai Fung, and the Showtime Mall. Another friend hosted us to many meals, including one at his house, where his mother made an entire table's worth of a feast and even sent us back with Tupperwares of

leftovers after. Making these friends was one of the most valuable parts of my experience, and I'm looking forward to visiting them again soon!

Additionally, our program coordinator planned fun excursions to Sun Moon Lake and Taichung, where we were able to travel with our CSMU friends to taste the tea culture (the tea eggs are every bit worth the hype), learn about the Indigenous tribes in Taiwan, and appreciate Confucian beliefs and the beauty of various temples. These weekend trips were a valuable way to immerse ourselves in the local culture and gain a better understanding of the patients we were working with.



My month in Taiwan was enriching, fulfilling, and altogether too short. Being immersed in a different city, language, and healthcare system was initially daunting, but after returning to the US, I can recognize the growth I had in fostering a global mindset. Finding the similarities in healthcare needs between different countries, like antibiotic resistance and cancer prevention, taught me how global partnership and learning helps us achieve the goal we all share in common: Better care and wellbeing for our patients. Now that I'm back at UAB, I hope to bring the same warmth (as warm as it feels to eat piping hot stinky tofu during June) that I felt from my friends in Taiwan to my endeavors in the US.