

Student exchange in Japan - experience at Hyogo Medical University by Anton Bilić

My name is Anton Bilić. I am 23 years old and I come from Croatia. I am a 6th-year medical student at the University of Rijeka. Together with two other colleagues, I participated in a student exchange in Japan at Hyogo Medical University for 4 weeks, from August 19th to September 13th. We were accommodated in a guest house located very close to the hospital.

The student exchange was structured so that I attended classes at the hospital. I also had some activities at the University, such as the English club. During the day, I had a lunch break in the University building's canteen. The weekends were free, and I mostly used them with my colleagues to travel to nearby cities and explore the beauty and charm of Japan. The first two weeks of classes at the hospital were in the cardiology department, while the last two weeks I spent in the neurosurgery department.

I began my hospital practice in cardiology together with my colleague Lucija Nikić. We started with catheter ablation under Dr. Mine, which takes place on Mondays in IVR. During the operation, we were allowed to enter the operating room and observe closely after putting on protective equipment. The doctor explained to us how the procedure is performed, which arrhythmias and conditions are indications for such procedure, and the technical staff showed us how to monitor the success of these procedures. After the operation, the doctor also let us try the catheters and balloons he used.

We attended many PCIs and coronary angiographies, which were thoroughly explained to us by Dr. Akahori. Under his supervision, we also observed valve surgeries – TAVI and MitraClip. He helped us a lot by providing detailed explanations, showing us the instruments, and answering our questions. I particularly emphasize his dedication and approachability, thanks to which we gained new knowledge and informations. We also observed endovascular surgeries on peripheral arteries with him, as well as the placement and removal of inferior vena cava filters.

We had the chance to observe pacemaker implantation surgeries, particularly those involving leadless pacemakers. Dr. Kawai showed us how to perform heart scintigraphy, and Dr. Daimon demonstrated how to conduct a heart echocardiogram.

Dr. Shintaku explained the procedure for patient care in the CCU several times, and with her, we reviewed patient histories, ECGs, and the lab results and findings of the patients in the department.

After the cardiology department, I moved to the neurosurgery department, where I was warmly welcomed. On my first day, I received a scrub top as a gift. My day started with meetings in English at 8 a.m. in the conference room. I participated in many surgeries and procedures, such as brain bypasses due to Moyamoya disease and chronic ischemia, meningioma surgery, laminectomies and other spinal surgeries, shunt implantation for hydrocephalus, and functional surgeries for Parkinson's disease.

I especially highlight the endovascular surgeries led and explained by the world-renowned neurosurgeon Dr. Yoshimura. I attended all endovascular aneurysm treatments, including coiling, stent-assisted coiling, mesh placement, and flow diverter placement. I participated in conferences and observed many procedures and surgeries - particularly the technique of microscopic suturing during bypasses. I was also able to practice the suturing technique in the neurosurgery office on a light microscope using gauze after I obtained 8.0 sutures myself, as they are slightly larger than the 10.0 sutures used in surgeries, making them easier to practice with. This technique requires a lot of patience and persistence, so I'm glad I have learned at least a small part of using microscopic sutures.

Dr. Kubo and Dr. Uchida were very helpful in explaining specific details of the surgeries. Dr. Harisinh Parmar, who was at the hospital for an observership, was particularly helpful. He spent a lot of time with me, explaining many things in neurosurgery and medicine, and his dedication greatly helped me understand some aspects of work.

During our entire stay in Japan, we were supported by Ms. Tomoka Shimada and her colleagues in the office, who showed us where everything was located, provided us with all the technical support we needed, such as phones and ID cards, and gave us information on what to do in case of natural disasters like earthquakes and typhoons. The hospital director also hosted us and gave us commemorative gifts. The English club, led by Prof. Furuse, was an opportunity to meet new colleagues studying at Hyogo College of Medicine, exchange our experiences, and learn about our very different cultures.

During our stay in Japan, we met many Japanese students who advised us on how to navigate Japan, what to visit, and some of them took the time to explore certain landmarks with us.

During our stay in Japan, we had the opportunity to travel and explore a lot. I visited Kyoto three times, with the most beautiful sights being Kiyomizu-dera, the bamboo forest, the Golden Pavilion, the monkey park, and the market. In Kobe, I visited the Nunobiki Herb Gardens and Ropeway, Nunobiki Falls, the port, and Suma Beach. In Nara, we visited the park and Todai-ji Temple, while we spent perhaps the most time in Osaka, exploring Dotonbori, Korea Town, USJ, museums and parks, and the stunning Kuchu Teien Observatory. We also spent a weekend in Tokyo, visiting DisneySea, Tokyo Skytree, Senso-ji, and teamLab Borderless. Perhaps the most beautiful place was Nishinomiya – our place of residence, with the gorgeous Muko River and its riverbank, delightful izakaya restaurants, LaLaport Koshien, and of course, the beautiful hospital. In addition to the very fine restaurants and exploring landmarks, the most interesting activity for me in Japan was definitely karaoke.

I must highlight the Japanese hospitality, their willingness to help, their sense of order and discipline, and their dedication to work. I would like to thank everyone for their assistance and for the chance to learn both clinical and cultural knowledge. This experience was an opportunity for enrichment and pushing boundaries, not only in a professional sense but also on a personal level. I hope this is also an opportunity for our two universities to strengthen their ties further, and that the Japanese students enjoyed their time in Croatia as much as we enjoyed our time in Japan.

Arigato gozaimasu!

Anton Bilić