

Renal Association Elective Bursary Report
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I undertook part of my elective in renal medicine at Juntendo University Hospital, a 1000-bed teaching hospital in Tokyo. The elective was organised through the International Centre at Juntendo as part of their Clinical Observership programme which welcomes many medical students from all over the world. I have always had an interest in Japanese culture and I chose to spend two weeks in the Department of Nephrology having gained an appreciation for the practice of managing renal disease during my general medicine blocks. I was also interested to learn how practices differ between Japan and what I have seen at home. I spent time shadowing doctors of various grades on ward rounds and as they reviewed patients, observed renal biopsies, spent time in the dialysis unit learning the basic principles, went to theatre to observe AV fistula formation in preparation for haemodialysis, attended department meetings including MDT, case conference and pathology meetings. Overall I enjoyed my time in the department and found that there was a wealth of learning opportunities to be found.

There were some challenges, particularly when it came to communication but on reflection, I realise that this was an opportunity to develop other skills. All patient interactions were conducted in Japanese, my knowledge of which does not extend beyond the very basics! Many of the Doctors I was with were able and willing to translate and answer my questions, often with the assistance of translation apps and me forming questions in such a way that was understandable. This is more difficult than I had realised as it is necessary to be very focussed in what it is I want to ask. Furthermore, I also found that I relied heavily on observation skills to facilitate my understanding of the patient's condition. I would be able to pick out some medical words from the interaction and combine this with what I could see in and around the patient to put the pieces of the puzzle together. I could then check with the doctor afterwards and ask any questions. This is something that we are taught to do from early on in medical school but when it is the main method of trying to understand what is happening until a translation can be given, and when this skill is practiced, I learned how much information can be found by simply observing. I hope I can carry this on in future practice.

One topic I was particularly interested to expand my understanding of whilst in Japan was the practice of organ donation and renal transplantation. Compared with other developed countries, Japan has a significantly lower rate of organ donation and patients with end-stage renal failure may expect to wait up to 12 years for a transplant. Consequently, a higher proportion of such patients are on haemodialysis compared to the UK, and ABO-incompatible transplants are carried out due to the limited donor pool. Research is also ongoing into achieving the same outcome without transplant including regeneration of tissues from stem cells [1]. I was aware of some of this before going on elective and was curious to find out more. From the conversations I had, there are many complex reasons for this. Many customs, traditions and rituals are deeply embedded in Japanese culture, societal norms and expectations. For example, there are customs surrounding death and funeral preparations that may influence people's approach to the practice of organ donation. Appreciating this depended therefore on understanding beliefs deeply held by Japanese society, beliefs that may be different to those that are commonplace at home but are nonetheless to be considered and respected. In asking the doctors I was with about this topic, I was mindful of being culturally sensitive about it. This was a good reminder that while medicine may have solutions to problems, we should still attempt to understand the bounds of what is acceptable and important to patients.

Overall, my elective was a great opportunity to consolidate my understanding of renal medicine from previous placements and to understand how the practice of medicine can differ between countries and cultures. This is something I will be mindful of going forward.

I also had a great time exploring Japan. It is an extremely friendly and welcoming country with so much to see and do, and something that fits every interest. I am grateful to the Renal Association for its support in allowing me to have this experience.

1 Aikawa A. Current status and future aspects of kidney transplantation in Japan. *Ren Replace Ther* 2018;4:50