

Lenses of a Global Experience

Category: Turning Over a New Leaf
written by Andrea Prokop | May 7, 2020

Starting to feel slightly fatigued from my residency training in the U.S., I departed for a one-month international rotation in Japan, hoping this would broaden my perspective and help reignite my joy for medicine. It was during a trip six years earlier to South Asia that my decision to go into medicine was affirmed, and I hoped this trip to Japan would provide me with similar inspiration.

I joined teams of residents, medical students and attending physicians as they rounded on patients in the hospital in Japan. Although I was unable to understand many of the conversations given the language barrier, I experienced each patient encounter in a deeper way. From noticing the jasmine tea and Japanese foods at the patients' bedsides, brought in by their families, to watching patients' facial expressions as the medical team delivered news about their conditions, or about how soon they would be able to go home, I experienced the bedside interactions in a richer way.

Outside of our bedside rounds, I spent time with the medical residents and joined them on their daily tasks. I noticed differences from my medical training in the U.S.—such as seeing the residents tediously preform all of their own gram stains to diagnose bacterial infections. When I told them I could order certain antibiotics or medications with complex dosing to be managed with help from the pharmacist, the Japanese residents were amazed that our practice had this assistance available. I also observed the residents presenting patient case after patient case, often with tired eyes but a calm perseverance, during stretches of work with very few days off and hours longer than I was working in the U.S.

After completing my one-month medical rotation in Japan, I came away with a renewed sense of the depth of each patient encounter, a greater respect for the cultural differences in medicine and a reminder that there are hard-working medical residents like me working all around the world. I returned to my clinical duties with a sense of rejuvenation—already daydreaming about my next medical trip.

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