

Fourth Recipient of the International Observership in Hepato-Biliary-Pancreatic Surgery

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I was selected as the fourth recipient of the International Observership awarded by JHBPS, and I studied in the U.S. for 18 months, from April 2002 through October 2003. This was a precious opportunity for me to see how clinical treatments are provided in the U.S.

The program involves three rotations, that is, six months spent at each of three institutions renowned for hepato-biliary pancreatic surgery. The goal is to observe how clinical treatments are provided, to observe surgeries performed by world-famous doctors in the field, and to conduct clinical research. Normally, Japanese doctors are given a chance to go abroad to do basic research, but this particular program is unique in the sense that one participates in much more than lab work.

The three institutions were Virginia Mason Medical Center (VMMC) in Seattle, Washington, with Dr. L. William Traverso as my host; UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles, California, with Dr. Howard Reber as my host, and Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, with Drs. Michael Sarr and Michael Farnell as my hosts.

I visited VMMC in Seattle first, and because almost all things (wards, outpatient services, surgery, and preoperative and postoperative conferences) were new to me, being from Japan, there was so much to learn there. Due to differences in language and culture, I often became confused. On top of the clinical training, I was given English language lessons, so I had more than a full schedule, but thanks to this tough 6 months, the 6-month stints at the two other institutions proved easier to adjust to. I found Seattle to be a beautiful city with wonderful seafood. Also, it is the home of the Mariners, where Ichiro was playing, so watching the baseball games gave me energy.

I spent the second 6 months of training at UCLA Medical Center, and I was a little more relaxed when I arrived there. I had already had some e-mail communication with Dr. Reber about my possible research, so I had a meaningful time there. Dr. Reber's surgeries are very smooth, and the 6 months I spent there were filled with impressive experiences, and the time simply flew by.

I drove for about a week to reach my last destination, Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. I had never before been so impressed with nature. The scenery between Los Angeles and Rochester was beyond words.

Mayo Clinic is always ranked as one of the top hospitals in the U.S. It is a state-of-the-art facility, and I quickly understood why so many students and researchers from all over the world wish to go to Mayo Clinic. Invited speakers were part of daily life at Mayo, and I learned a lot. I was able to observe hepato-biliary pancreatic surgeries, laparoscopic surgeries, and transplant surgeries, among others, which made my stay very gratifying.

Dr. Traverso, Dr. Reber, Dr. Sarr, and Dr. Farnell all performed top-notch, skillful surgeries, and I learned a great deal just by watching.

At each institution, I was given a clinical research project. Between clinical tours, I had a chance to review patients' records. My research project at VMMC was "Consideration of the Definition of Insufficient Pancreatojejunostomy After Pancreatoduodenectomy," and at UCLA it was "A Study of Neoadjuvant Chemotherapy for Progressive Pancreatic Cancer." I was granted the opportunity to give oral presentations on these topics at the Pancreas Club and the American College of Surgeons meetings.

At Mayo Clinic, I engaged in "A Study on Reoperation of Chronic Pancreatitis," and I am planning to present my findings at an international conference and eventually publish a paper.

All doctors at the three institutions were very nice, and I am grateful to all of them. Meeting renowned doctors in the field of hepato-biliary-pancreatic surgery was certainly a boost for me. I will forever cherish the time I spent with them. Of course, I will utilize what I learned in this program back in Japan. By doing so, I want to impress young doctors with what a wonderful opportunity the Observership is.

I would like to thank Prof. Tadataka Takada for this opportunity. I would also like to thank Prof. Kawarada and Ms. Sato and Ms. Takahashi of the Secretariat, who kindly encouraged me often via e-mail.

