



Newsletter

No. 38 September 30 2020

Tokyo Medical and Dental University
Latin American Collaborative Research Center (LACRC)

A report on returning home

Greetings to you all! My name is Tomoyuki Odagaki and I was working at the Latin American Collaborative Research Center (LACRC) until the end of March last year.

I returned to Japan on July 10 and resumed by post in the Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology at TMDU on July 27, following two weeks in quarantine.

I had initially planned to return to Japan at the end of March, but the imposition of total mandatory quarantine in Santiago due to the spread of COVID-19 meant that my move and the shipment of my possessions had to be pushed back. The global pandemic also led to a drastic reduction in international flights and I had to wait for over three months before I could leave.

Medical personnel were allowed to travel to work under the total mandatory quarantine, but since all non-emergency endoscopic procedures were canceled under a Ministry of Health directive, clinical activities under the National Colorectal Cancer Screening Project (PRENEC) were also put on hold.

Residents were permitted to leave their homes just twice a week for up to three hours a time, but only to shop for groceries, pay utility bills, carry out necessary banking or government office procedures and otherwise maintain their lifestyles. They were required to apply to the police department online for authorization, but I was very concerned about contracting COVID-19 in a foreign country, and mostly used delivery services refrained from going out to the extent possible.

The school and kindergarten my children attended were also subject to closure, but online classes began very quickly. I had one child in elementary school grade three, another in grade one and the youngest was in kindergarten. In particular, the younger two needed parental support in taking their classes, meaning virtually constant attention. It was difficult for us to adjust to the new situation, but it also gave us a lot of time for things we normally might not do, including drawing pictures, arts and crafts, physical exercise and practicing music together. Obviously, the children have more fun doing these things with their friends and teachers, but the experience was invaluable to me as a parent. Not being able to go out was more stressful on the children than us adults, but the online lessons gave rhythm to our lives and helped us to stay positive in the midst of uncertainty.

In Chile, the number of new infections is gradually decreasing, no doubt as a result of the extended mandatory total quarantine, and restrictions are beginning to be lifted in areas with a low incidence of COVID-19. Since PRENEC is a screening project that targets asymptomatic patients, its resumption may take some time given current priorities. I wish that a swift end will be brought to this pandemic and that TMDU can resume its activities in Chile at the earliest possible opportunity.

Tomoyuki Odagaki, Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology



LACRC TMDU
IN CHILE
Latin American Collaborative Research Center
Santiago de Chile



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Update on the COVID-19 Pandemic

Update on the COVID-19 pandemic in Chile

As mentioned in the previous issue, the Chilean government declared a state of emergency (*estado de catástrofe*) in mid-March and the country remains under a daily nationwide curfew and mandatory stay-at-home restrictions. These early measures succeeded in slowing the increase in new infections and the restrictions on going out were lifted in Las Condes (where the LACRC office is located) in mid-April due to the low infection count. The curfew and mandatory stay-at-home restrictions were reimposed just two weeks later, however, due to a rapid increase in new infections.

In mid-June, Chile's health minister was replaced after being forced to take responsibility for pressure on the nation's health system caused by prolonged spread of the infection, and controversy over errors in the Ministry of Health press releases on the number of deaths from the COVID-19 outbreak. Measures were also being taken at Clínica Las Condes (CLC), home to the LACRC office, in readiness for a sharp increase in COVID-19 patients, but patient numbers increased more quickly than expected, and there were infections among medical and administrative staff at CLC, leading to major upheaval. Some medical institutions in Santiago were unable to secure enough beds to accommodate critically ill patients, which led to patients being transferred to hospitals in different areas with the capacity to provide necessary care.

The pandemic has had a serious impact on the economy, prompting the government to take a number of steps in response to rising unemployment and growing poverty, including relief supplies of food and daily necessities for low-income citizens, subsidy payments to middle-class citizens who meet certain conditions, soft (long-term, low-interest) loans, mortgage payment holidays, and allowing citizens to withdraw 10% of their pensions in Chile's Pension Fund Administrators (AFP) system. In local communities, too, volunteers distributed parcels containing food and daily necessities and prepared meals for unemployed people.

In response to the situation in Chile, the government of Japan decided to provide grant aid to support medical equipment purchases. The signing ceremony for this initiative was widely reported by local media (see left-hand photo below).

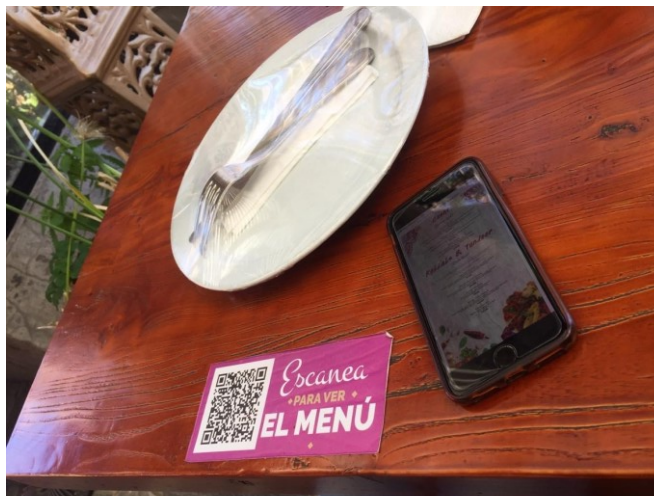
The spread of the virus finally began slowing in late July. At that stage, Chile had reported a cumulative total of around 460,000 infections, with new infections averaging around 7,000 cases daily at peak, although this figure has since dropped to around 1,000 new infections on average daily. Restrictions are now being gradually eased, starting with certain parts of the metropolitan region. Stay-at-home measures have been lifted and commercial facilities that have taken measures to prevent infection are starting to reopen in areas where many Japanese people reside.

Every year, Chileans celebrate Independence Day (commonly referred to as "El Dieciocho" or "18th" as the celebration occurs on September 18) over the course of an extended holiday in September. However, since the COVID-19 restrictions had yet to be lifted in many areas, this year's Independence Day was a lonely one for many in a country that values time spent with family and friends.

The situation remains severe, as countries the world over watch for signs of second and third waves of the COVID-19, and we continue to pray for a speedy return to healthy, peaceful life.



The signing ceremony (photograph provided by the Embassy of Japan in Chile) Yoshinobu Hiraishi, (then) Japanese Ambassador to Chile and Andrés Allamand, Minister of Foreign Affairs.



To prevent the spread of infection, many restaurants are switching to digital menus accessible through a QR code scanned via smartphone.

Joint Degree Program

As mentioned in the previous issue, the COVID-19 pandemic is having a major impact on the Joint Degree Program (JDP). The University of Chile suspended face-to-face teaching in late March, forcing students to adapt to a different style of learning. In addition, travel for the first cohort of students that was scheduled to begin studying at TMDU in April was abruptly halted, and it remains unclear when these students will be able to travel to Japan. In this issue, we present Dr. Alessandra Cassana, a fourth-year JDP student who is struggling to balance work and student life in the midst of the global pandemic.

My experience and student life during the COVID-19 pandemic

Dr. Carla Alessandra Cassana Abad

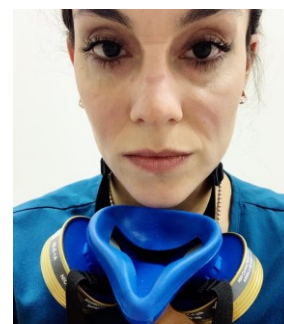
*Joint Doctoral Degree Program in Medical Sciences - Coloproctologic Surgery
Universidad de Chile - Tokyo Medical and Dental University - Clínica Las Condes*

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has affected the world in a way no one expected. These have been very difficult times, an era of challenge for everyone, and especially for the healthcare personal who have become the front line of battle in this pandemic. As a physician, as well as a surgeon, I have been attending to COVID-19 patients as well as surgery patients. In my workplace, we had to be trained with the corresponding protocols for the approach and treatment of respiratory cases, and it has been challenging due to the number of patients arriving to the emergency room.

As a Joint Degree Doctoral Program student, I have been forced to adapt to remote classes. Although it has been a challenge to take some courses that have a practical section in laboratory, such as Molecular Biology, my tutors and professors have been very supportive and have taken new strategies to help us fulfill the course objectives. Through this new method of learning, I have been provided with electronic resources, including video and audio files, bibliographic seminars and more. Likewise, I am amazed by the speed with which all scientific teams worldwide have been researching and publishing information about SARS-CoV-2, contributing greatly to the management of this disease.

As a human being, I have suffered the loss of loved ones because of COVID-19, in addition to the loss of thousands of healthcare colleagues and others around the world. It has been very painful to see the increasing numbers of cases, and very frustrating to realize the lack of empathy from many people that don't realize the importance of keeping quarantine to mitigate the contagion. For us, in name of the entire scientific community, just one death is too much. The people putting in effort to continue studying in postgraduate programs during these hard times are very valuable, because we will continue to need intellectual and clinical preparedness in response to global health issues of this nature.

Although this pandemic has caused the world much suffering, it has also taught us what is truly important: medical education, both in the field of research and in clinical practice, is the basis of all healthcare. Without our health, we have nothing.



Dr. Cassana's face showing indentations from her protective mask after emergency outpatient work.

JDP student gives a special lecture for medical students



A poster for Dr. Cassana's special lecture.

On August 19, Dr. Cassana, a fourth-year student in the JDP medical sciences program, gave a special lecture as a TMDU student on writing dissertations using digital tools to medical students at the Viña del Mar Campus of Andrés Bello University.

The lecture was given online due the impact of the COVID-19 but was attended by 130 students, suggesting a high level of interest.

As a special lecture from a current JDP student, this event additionally served as a good opportunity to shine light on the TMDU JDP program.

PRENEC Progress Report

Here are the latest developments in the Prevention Project for Neoplasia of the Colon and Rectum (PRENEC). Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, all PRENEC-related activities had to be suspended in March. In July, however, a webinar (online seminars) was held for the respective PRENEC hubs and other Latin American countries. Please see details below.

Online PRENEC seminar

**WEBINAR
CIRUGÍA DE
COLON**

TÍTULO:
"TRATAMIENTO DEL CÁNCER
COLORRECTAL PRECOZ EN EL
MARCO DE UN PROGRAMA DE
CRIBADO"

MODERADOR

**Dr. Francisco López Kostner**
Jefe Unidad de Coloproctología CLC.
Director de PreneC (Programa de Prevención de Neoplasia Colorrectal)

EXPOSITORES

**Dr. Udo Kronberg**
Cirujano Coloproctólogo
Unidad de Coloproctología
Clínica Las Condes

**Dr. Claudio Wainstein**
Cirujano Coloproctólogo
Centro de Especialidades en Piso Pelviano CEPP
Unidad de Coloproctología
Clínica Las Condes

TEMAS

PRESENTE Y FUTURO DE LA RED
PRENEC (Programa de Prevención de Neoplasia Colorrectal)
NOVEDADES
Dr. Francisco López Kostner

TRATAMIENTO ENDOSCÓPICO
DEL CCR
Dr. Udo Kronberg

CONSEJOS EN LA CIRUGÍA LAP
DEL CCR PRECOZ
Dr. Claudio Wainstein

PREGUNTAS Y DISCUSIÓN

Webex Meeting

Cisco
webex

The webinar poster.

On July 23, colorectal surgeons at CLC gave a webinar on the screening program for early colorectal cancer treatment.

Around 40 people participated in this online seminar, including physicians from Ecuador, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru, in addition to the directors and staff at the various PRENEC bases here in Chile.

In addition to presenting the latest findings and techniques in endoscopy and surgical treatment, Dr. Francisco López, who heads the PRENEC program, talked about the history of the project and its achievements, placing particular emphasis on the cooperation extended by Japanese physicians from TMDU.

The issue of the increase in the number of patients on the waiting list for PRENEC screening due to the impact of the COVID-19 was also discussed, including the measures to be taken going forward.

A decision on the resumption of PRENEC activities has yet to be made, but there are plans to hold additional webinars and online meetings for the open exchange of ideas and opinions.

Editor's Note

A Chilean vote to rewrite the constitution that was scheduled for October was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and this is currently a matter of major concern for the nation's citizens.

A referendum on the pros and cons of constitutional amendment is approaching, and there is already dispute among pro- and anti-factions. If the bill to amend the constitution is passed, discussion will then follow on what amendments are to be made to the current charter, which are then set to be enforced after a process expected to take around two years.

Whatever the outcome, we hope the referendum will be a positive development for Chile in the years to come.

(Miki Hayakawa, LACRC)

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