

TMDU graduates are active at the forefront of their fields in countries worldwide. Studying abroad helped them deepen their knowledge as healthcare professionals, benefiting both their field and patients around the globe.

Letters from TMDU Overseas Alumni

Letter 01

From TMDU to Becoming a Public Health Leader  
A journey dedicated to improving health of the most vulnerable population



Shafiqullah Hemat  
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**PURSUING A Ph.D** program in a competitive and diverse academic environment was amongst my top career priorities. Tokyo Medical and Dental University (TMDU) provided that opportunity to me when I was enrolled in the Ph.D. program in the Health Promotion Department (Division of International Health Development) in 2005. I was excited to become part of a society where hard work, punctuality, respect and kindness were the norm. The diverse student body coming from different cultural backgrounds made the learning environment more enriching, letting me observe and analyze global challenges from various perspectives. As a result, I have grown to become a global citizen who enjoys and appreciates diversity, mutual respect and an inclusive society.

The academic journey at TMDU was full of surprises and fond memories. As a stranger, during the first few days, I had a hard time getting accustomed to my new life in the high-tech and crowded city of Tokyo. But I was lucky to have very supportive professors and peers who

encouraged me throughout this enriching journey. A very special memory that I will always cherish was when my research paper was accepted within 26 days by a prestigious academic journal, something that would normally have taken months. Another memory that I have kept is when Professor Keiko Nakamura, my supervisor, presented me with flowers upon the successful defense of my Ph.D. thesis.

After successful completion of my Ph.D. program, I returned to my home country of Afghanistan, aiming to transfer the knowledge and research skills to improve the deteriorated health system in our country. I joined the Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan as the Director of Health Promotion where I have continuously strived to ensure that the Afghan people live healthier and more fulfilling lives. Since joining this office, I have been an integral part of many new developments in our health sector. In these years, I have had tremendous achievements such as:

- Establishing a well functioning and



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results-oriented national health promotion team;

- Forming a community mobilization network of more than 150 people;
- Creating a toll free (166) health call center;
- Developing a national school health curriculum for grades 4 to 12;
- Initiating a water, sanitation and hygiene program in health care facilities;
- Initiating and implementing community mobilization programs through which hundreds of communities are certified as healthy communities for several lifesaving indicators;
- Developing a Mother and Child Health Handbook (MCH) which resulted in increasing health knowledge and utilization of health services at the communities ; and
- Developing several policy documents.

Annually I raise and manage a budget of around two million USD for health promotion interventions throughout Afghanistan. As a researcher, I have conducted various published and unpublished researches and presented abstracts

at various international conferences across the globe. Additionally, I am serving as a member of the National Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Afghanistan’s Ministry of Public Health. In addition to my position at the Ministry of

Public Health, I am working with the Ministry of Higher Education in the capacity of an associate professor at Nangarhar Medical Faculty, a prestigious university in the country.

I would advise TMDU students to feel

proud of the opportunity to study at such a well-known university. It helps them to grow personally and professionally and stress the virtue of compassion which would allow them to contribute to their country’s health systems strengthening.

Letter 02

How TMDU shaped my academic career



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Patricia Pereira

**AS A DENTAL** student in Brazil in 1991, I became intrigued by the research articles on dentin bonding authored by Dr. Fusayama’s team at TMDU. This curiosity led me to attend major dental meetings and inquire about dentin bonding and why it was not a common practice in western countries. Lacking good explanations, I decided to pursue advanced education at TMDU. I was awarded a Monbusho Scholarship, and two months after graduation in February 1993, I moved to Japan. I lived in Osaka for 6 months to study Japanese language and culture at Osaka University of Foreign Studies, and then moved to Tokyo to study at TMDU. Dr. Tagami had recently been appointed Professor and Chair of the Department of Conservative Dentistry 1, currently the Department of Cariology and Operative Dentistry.

At TMDU, I joined the Ph.D. program and was honored to be mentored by brilliant world-renowned professors of the department. I knew that the future of my career would depend on my academic achievements and experiences at TMDU. I tried my best to become a well-rounded academician, doing patient care, helping

in preclinical courses, and collaborating in various research projects. I made many lifelong friends, with whom I still remain in close contact. I defended my Ph.D. thesis and was honored to receive the IADR Toshio Nakao Fellowship in 1998. I then married and applied to the Japan Society for Promotion of Science (JSPS) for a two-year postdoctoral fellowship, and was able to continue my research collaboration at TMDU.

After 7 years studying in Japan, it was time to find a job. I was hired by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as an assistant professor and remained on the faculty for six years. At UNC-Chapel Hill, I was able to contribute with clinical and preclinical teaching and patient care while also conducting research as a principal investigator for several industry and government grants. I also hosted several international postgraduate fellows in my research laboratory, sharing and multiplying the knowledge acquired at TMDU. During my time in North Carolina, my two children were born within a 3-year period. Suddenly, despite being successful professionally, I longed for my extended family in our daily lives. My husband and I decided to move back to

Brazil to raise our children close to our extended family and have them develop family roots in Brazil. While living in Brazil, I joined the faculty of the University of Brasilia, opened a private practice and a CE institute that has trained over 1500 dentists in esthetic dentistry, while also becoming a certified prosthodontist.

We spent nine busy and happy years in Brazil, but my boys grew and wanted to pursue college education in the United States. It was a tough decision but it was time to move back to the United States. In 2015, my husband and I joined the University of Florida College of Dentistry (UFCD) as clinical associate professors. Since joining UFCD, I have been involved in predoctoral and postdoctoral teaching. I developed and started a 3-year master’s and certificate program in operative and esthetic dentistry, with the first class graduating in June 2020. Most recently, I also became the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. With this role, my duties became primarily administrative, but I remain an educator and clinical practitioner. Before making this decision, I reflected and understood that, like my colleagues in Japan, this is a natural path to take as we mature in academia. I attribute the path of my academic career to my mentors, training, and life experiences at TMDU and in Japan. Hard work, ethics, teamwork, honesty, and emotional intelligence, regardless of the order, are the ingredients for a successful academic pathway.



Department faculty and  
advanced education  
students