

**G**raduate students who are active in the front lines all the countries of the world. The great experience of studying abroad helps deepen your knowledge as a healthcare professional, benefiting both your medical field and international humanity.

## Letters from TMDU Overseas Alumni

Letter 01

### My precious moment in Japan



**Paksinee Kamolratanakul**  
Chulalongkorn University  
from Thailand



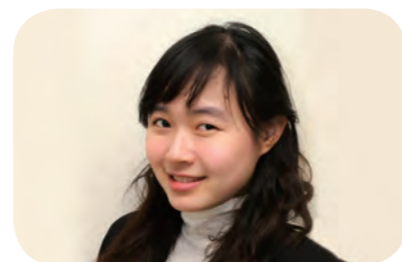
I HAD NEVER dreamt of studying abroad in Japan before I was proposed for the Monbukagakusho scholarship from the Faculty of Dentistry at Chulalongkorn University (CU), where I've worked as a staff lecturer since I received my bachelor's degree in dentistry in 2005. Our universities, CU and TMDU, have a long and close relationship. Part of our relationship is shown by an agreement between us that allows ten staff members (one person per year) from CU to study at TMDU, supported by Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). My greatest honor is to be one of the ten people who have been/will be selected to join this contract.

I did not know how gorgeous Japan

is until I first arrived at Japan in 2006. Although everything looks different from my country, I feel at home. Before my first step in Japan, I was welcomed by a professor in the maxillofacial department of TMDU, where I would eventually belong. Upon my arrival, I got a warm welcome from all staffs and senior students. It was my duty to take a Japanese language course for six months before applying for the graduate school. I realized what a friendship beyond frontiers is. We met international friends from various countries; Thailand, China, India, Germany, Jordan, Egypt, Syria. We became close friends easily because we were strangers but we wished to be a part of Japan and a



Dinner with President Ohyama and TMDU professors.



Working at Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Faculty of Dentistry, CU.

part of each other by using our third language, Japanese.

While I was taking the Japanese course, I had to attend the oral surgery at an outpatient clinic and had duties in patient preparation and working as a ward assistant and in the operation room after my morning classes finished. I tried to learn Japanese from everywhere – my Japanese teachers, my colleagues, my seniors, my staffs, and even my patients. The more I learnt Japanese, the more friends I got and the more academic knowledge I gained. After finishing the course, I entered the Molecular Pharmacology department to begin research work in bone biology. The professor at this department was also kind to me. The staff and seniors supported me, guided me and helped me as I was really new for research.

My tutor was also my senior in the maxillofacial department. She greatly supported me, not only how to work in laboratory or how to begin my own research, but also she looked after me for

everything: lifestyle, how to live, where to go. All the members of the department taught me the basics of animal model research and cellular-molecular research, which I had never done be-

fore. Every morning, we had seminar and journal club in Japanese. I spent most of my time there with them, every lunch and some weekends, not just at the lab.

My four and a half years in Japan have been too short. I have been immersed in the culture and society and understand that not only I am in Japan, but also Japan is in me.

Letter 02

### Being able to study in Japan and after returning to my home country, Indonesia



**Sri Angky Soekanto**  
Indonesian Medical Council  
from Republic of Indonesia



AFTER TRAVELING TO Japan a number of times with my family since 1975, I have always dreamt of being able to study in Japan. I finally got the opportunity to do so after I was accepted as a young lecturer at the Faculty of Dentistry, Universitas Indonesia, in 1986. I was able to pass the examination given by the Japanese and Indonesian governments, and was able to leave for Japan in 1988. My goal was to obtain a PhD at the best university in Japan. I was lucky enough to be able to study at TMDU, under the guidance of the late Professor Hideaki Ogura, who at that time held the position of Dean at the Faculty of Dentistry, TMDU.

I also received much help and support from the instructors, laboratory staff, and fellow doctorate students. I felt that our department had a real tradition of helping each other and trying to achieve maximum results. We were also given the opportunity to study the latest scientific developments, by yearly attending seminars. By attending these seminars all over Japan, from Hokkaido to Kagoshima, I also feel that indirectly

experience Japanese culture.

I feel that my studies at TMDU have brought about a real change in my life, a change that has lasted until today. Not only I was lucky enough to receive the most up-to-date knowledge, but also I successfully achieved my career after returning to my own country as a result of gathered knowledge in TMDU, which I received outside the classroom or laboratory. The example and leadership shown by my advisers have made me stronger and more confident, both as an instructor and as a leader in my faculty back in Indonesia.

After I returned to my own country, I became a team member of the Total Quality Management Team, President's Office (UI), from 1996 to 1998. Apart from becoming an instructor, the main task in this capacity was to perform self-evaluation by accumulating data in order to prepare the university for the future development, particularly in the field of educational quality. Afterwards, in 1999, our faculty won a reputable project called "Quality for Undergraduate Education," a four-year grant pro-



Prof. Keiichi Ohya (my supervisor at TMDU) and I were in Hiroshima in October 2011.

vided by the government, awarded in order to improve the quality of education through competition. Up to the year 2003, I was the Executive Director of this project. This project was a real breakthrough for us, and enabled us to change the academic atmosphere and to improve our teaching-learning method. It's outcomes included an integrated curriculum, integrated clinical education, a competence-based curriculum using problem-based learning (2003 to present).

Our subsequent pioneering achievements include: the first and only Faculty of Dentistry that received the national QUE project (1999-2003); among the first three Faculties of Dentistry in Asia to use the PBL method (together with HKU and Thammasat University) in 2003; the first Faculty of Dentistry to use a competence based curriculum in Indonesia (following the standards of the Indonesian Medical Council) in 2005; the first Faculty of Dentistry to be reviewed by SEAADE in 2005; the first Faculty of Dentistry in Indonesia to incorporate Minimal Intervention into the curriculum in 2005; the first Faculty of Dentistry in Indonesia to use Improved Community Based Curriculum in 2006; the first Faculty of Dentistry in Indonesia to use Integrated Clinic Education in 2007; and the first Faculty of Dentistry in Indonesia to implement Minimal Intervention in Clini-



Meeting a Council from my country, with all the Deans from Faculties of Dentistry in the Mekong River Region.



cal Education in 2007.

At the moment, I occupy a position in the Division of Dental Education, at the Indonesian Medical Council (IMC). IMC was established in the year 2005, under Act No. 29/2004 on Medical Practice. It is an autonomous non-structural institution, and is responsible to the President of the Republic of Indonesia. The main function of IMC is to establish regulations on medical practice in Indonesia. Its specific duties include: Registration of Doctors and Dentists;

Ratifying Education standards for Medical and Dental Schools, including standards of competencies for doctors and dentists; guiding and supervising medical practice in Indonesia. IMC has 17 members, who together represent the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of National Education, various professional organizations, the Association of Medical and Dental Schools, the Association of Hospitals and lay members. The organizational structure consists of a Medical Council and a Dental Council,

each of which has three divisions, namely: the Division of Medical/Dental Education, the Division of Registration, and the Division of Medical Practice Supervision.

Also, I am in the process of forming an alumni association for dentists who have studied in Japan. It is my sincere hope that in the future we will be able to continue strengthening the connectivity between Asian dental education institutions, while sustaining and improving our networking activities.

Letter 03

### TMDU and URUGUAY screening program for colorectal cancer



**Eduardo Fenocchi**  
National Cancer Institute Uruguay  
from Uruguay



**I MET PROFESSOR** Nakamura and Professor Eishi in Chile, in 1995, while attending a JICA course at the Professor P. Llorens hospital. We talked about the high incidence of colorectal cancer in my country, Uruguay, and the possibility of setting up a screening program for that pathology by using a new test. This new test, the IFOBT, was introduced by Professor Eishi in his lecture. It was developed in Japan by Eiken Chemical company and detects occult blood in feces using an immunological reaction.

Since that time we began to work with Professor Eishi on a useful and applicable screening program for colorectal cancer in Uruguay, with the support of JICA and TMDU.

For this purpose, I visited Japan for 3 months in 1997, from July to October,

and my activities there were centered in the Pathology Department and in the Endoscopy Department of TMDU. I also met with JICA staff members and with authorities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as we tried to get a budget for our project.

I received individual training so nobody travelled with me on this visit to Japan. When I arrived in Tokyo I stayed at the Ichigaya Center, which was nearly empty at that moment (only four students were in the building). It was near the hospital but also was in a land with culture, language and transportation systems very different from what I was used to. But all the people in TMDU were kind, and tried to help me in the different activities. We had fun together, as well as receiving training in ther-



In a scientific-social weekend event, I visited Ito-shi with staff members and students from the Department of Pathology.



In the Endoscopy Unit with Dr. Tsubaki (left) and Dr. Takeshita (right)

apeutic endoscopy with Dr. Tsubaki at the Endoscopy Department and attending JICA's Pathology Course directed by Professor Nakamura. I remember the Pathology Department was at that moment in the old building but was soon moved to a new building, with new equipment, in a very nice area.

Fortunately, the project was approved after all and in 1999 we could start with the activities of mass screening for colorectal cancer in Uruguay, setting up a Digestive Cancer Center at the National Cancer Institute of Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay. Since that moment to date, we receive funding from JICA and technical support from TMDU. The greater part of our staff participates in courses or activities of TMDU in the areas of Surgery, Endoscopy, Pathology and Oncology; of course some people from TMDU have visited our Center in Uruguay in these years. For example, Professor Eishi has come here four times, Professor Nakamura twice, and Noboru Ando and Jiro Kumagai one time each.

Our screening program is now going well all over our country, and a lot of

adenomas and cancers have been detected, also "de novo" cancer, one of the things I learn to find during my visit to Japan, applying chromoscopy and magnification endoscopy. With Professor Eishi we published an article in 2006 in the European Journal of Cancer Prevention about the results of the screening in Uruguay. At this moment it

is the only National Program in all of Latin America. We are now "exporting" the knowhow related to this project. Argentina is undertaking a pilot study and Paraguay and Mexico are interested in using our experience.

I am glad to visit Japan and I appreciate so much the opportunity given to me by TMDU to stay there, to support

Letter 04

### Learning more about the field of early neoplasia, I became interested in other related fields



**Adolfo Parra-Blanco**  
Asturias Central University Hospital  
from Spain



**MY STORY IN** Japan starts when I was 15 years old. My father suggested that I study Japanese. I accepted the challenge, and studied for two years until I entered medical school. That experience made me get in touch with Japan, its culture and people. When I finished my training in gastroenterology in Spain, I was willing to further my knowledge in endoscopy in Japan, and I was awarded with a Mombusho scholarship, and later on with a European Union postdoctoral grant. The topic for my training and research was "Endoscopic techniques for the diagnosis and treatment of early gastrointestinal neoplasms".

My host center was Showa University Fujigaoka Hospital, under the tuition of Professor Rikiya Fujita. With him and his team I started experiencing the proverbial and never over-emphasized Japanese hospitality and kindness, also their hard and perfectionist work. As I

learned more about the field of early neoplasia, I became interested in other related fields, such as histopathological diagnosis. I was lucky to meet Professor Kyouchi Nakamura, a Professor in the Department of Pathology in TMDU at that time. He accepted me at his department as a visiting doctor, where I visited once, and later twice, a week, for two years.

My aim was not really to be able to make a diagnosis with a microscope by myself, but rather to improve my understanding of the relationship between endoscopy and pathology in the specific field of early neoplasia. For instance, I performed a study about histological and immunostaining features of minute gastric cancers ( $\leq 5$ mm in size). Also, thanks to Professor Nakamura once again, I was accepted by Dr. Fujii in Kashiwa and Tsukiji National Cancer Center to learn magnifying colonoscopy, a technique for which some knowl-



With colleagues at Oviedo Hospital and some Japanese endoscopy experts.

the program and to now be part of this new project of extend the screening to other countries in an international collaboration named "South-South".

To all my friends, colleagues and staff members at TMDU, many thanks. I remember you with all my heart, all my days. I am very proud to be a JICA and TMDU alumni.



My family at the Natural History Museum in London.

edge of pathology is desirable.

I must say that I really enjoyed my time at TMDU. Why? Most probably, because I met a great group of people, where everybody was important, from the Professor to the newest team member. Of course, the scientific level of the presentations, meetings, and discussions were very high. What I learned there was important for me, later on, as a gastroenterologist and endoscopist. I had an especially close relationship with Professor Nakamura, Professor Eishi, and Dr. Kumagai, but also many other people such as Suzuki-san, Andou-san, and other colleagues who I really appreciate and whose kindness I will never forget. Interestingly enough, many of our talks were in Spanish. This is because the educational relationship of this department with South America (mainly with Chile) was very strong. They taught me a lot about pathology, and I tried to help them with their Spanish. (although I must say that they were already pretty fluent!)

During my stay at TMDU, I had the chance to meet a great number of Japanese and foreign doctors, (mainly pathologists) who attended the special courses organized by JICA. Finally, my wife, a Brazilian nikkei, whom I met in Japan, was a Mombusho scholar in Od-



ontology at TMDU. Therefore, from several standpoints, I must admit that my experience in Japan changed my life.

Altogether I spent four years in Japan. After my return to Spain in 1999, I worked in the field of endoscopy for 11 years in two large university hospitals. The first was in Tenerife (Canary Islands) and then in Oviedo (Asturias). My main topics of research have been: detection of flat colorectal neoplasms, chromoendoscopy, advanced endoscopic resection techniques, and screening

for colorectal cancer with immunochemical fecal occult blood tests. For the latter issue, the support I received from TMDU (my special thanks to Professor Eishi) was of paramount importance for the success of the research. I cannot forget mentioning Dr. Eduardo Fenocchi, a leader of endoscopy in Uruguay, who is conducting a very important screening program in his country and who has helped us significantly. I first met him at TMDU, and has become a good friend ever since.

Right now there is a new turning

point in my career and in my life – I will move to Santiago de Chile to become an Associate Professor in the Department of Gastroenterology of the Pontificia Universidad Catolica next month. My main goal there will be to increase the endoscopic detection of early gastric, esophageal, and colonic neoplasias. I was happy to learn that Professor Eishi and his group are collaborating with a Chilean institution to promote colorectal cancer screening. I'm very glad that our paths will cross again, and this time in South America!

And so, I became a nurse practitioner. I no longer routinely manipulate IV tubing and pumps or draw blood, but I am more responsible for a wide range of patient care. I work in the bone marrow transplant service at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Our pa-

tients are very sick, but I am impressed by their fighting spirit as they battle against their disease. I am actually encouraged by these brave patients. English is not my native language and I am sometimes unable to understand exactly what they are trying to tell me. Yet they

trust me as a professional.

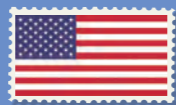
It is impossible to mention all people who have helped me over the years, but thanks to their support, here I am. I am trying to devote myself to learning, so that I will be able to repay them some day.

Letter 05

Supported by people in New York, here I am



Miho Suzuki  
Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center  
from USA



**I CAME TO** New York City approximately 13 years ago. I cannot clearly recall what made me come here. Now I have been working as a nurse practitioner for a year and a half, but when I left Japan I did not imagine that I would ever work in the US and speak English while doing so. I did not even know the existence of nurse practitioners. I might say that I just wanted to see how nursing was practiced in the US, because what I learned in the nursing program at TMDU, especially regarding nursing theories, was all from the US. Still I never planned to stay here this long. To be sure, I could not live here without support from people whom I encountered in New York.

I originally started going to an English language school attached to a col-

lege. One day, when I was walking on the campus of College of Staten Island, I found a tutor room. It is common for colleges in the US to provide tutors for academic writing, and students in the English language program could use the tutor room for free. Thus, I started to get one-on-one tutoring after school. One of the tutors was a newly graduated chiropractor, who was volunteering while waiting for his license. Since I told him that I was a nurse, he used medical contexts in my practicing English. He was very patient while I struggled with the language. Gradually, I gained confidence.

I obtained a registered nurse (RN) license in New York State while studying English. I wanted to work as an RN, but I did not know anything about hospitals



With my current colleagues at work.

in New York, and my visa status did not allow me to work. Thus, I enrolled in the PhD program in nursing at New York University. The faculty members were very supportive and I received full tuition, health insurance, and stipend. I am grateful that even after I finished the program, Dr. Norman, the program director at that time, and I are still friends, and the other faculty members kindly and promptly answer any academic questions I might have.

I missed the clinical environment when I was immersed in the academic setting as a doctoral student. Then, one of my classmates informed me about a hospital that would sponsor my green card (permanent resident status). I went to a job interview at this hospital and was finally able to work as an RN in a clinical setting. At work, I saw nurse practitioners who were rounding with physicians, prescribing medications, ordering tests, etc. I felt that they were more involved in patient care than RNs were. In the US, RNs just provide care as prescribed, while in Japan, RNs often discuss patient care with physicians.



On Thanksgiving Day with the family of Dr. Norman, at her house.

Letter 06

Imperial College TMDU exchange 2011



Yishi Tan  
Imperial College  
Exchange Program from UK



**EVERY YEAR FOUR** medical students from Imperial College London travel to TMDU for three months to complete a BSc project. Last year we were the lucky four (Kelly Ameneshoa, Andrew Gordon, Richard Newman, Yishi Tan) who were offered this placement. We were all thrilled to be offered this precious opportunity and here is a short story of our time in Japan.

It is common knowledge in the West that the Japanese are kind and polite; we soon realized what a massive understatement this is. From the moment our plane touched down we were overwhelmed by the Japanese sense of hospitality and kindness. It was unbelievable to see how everyone went out of their way to help us, something best demonstrated by the care we were shown during the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and its aftermath.

The earthquake obviously affected our trip, in fact it almost abruptly ended it, but we were able to convince our professors in England that we were safe and were allowed to complete our trip.

And by the end some of us felt so attached to our lab teams that they felt like family to us, and Japan and TMDU felt like home.

We also formed many unforgettable friendships outside the labs. In our first weekend, we joined the 4th year medical students for their end of year conference. It was here we got to know many of the TMDU students who helped to make our stay so enjoyable. We were given a lot of useful information, ranging from the best noodle shop in Ochanomizu to the difference between SKE and AKB48.

Many memorable nights were spent in izakayas and karaoke bars, things which we were all frankly addicted to by the end of our stay. We also had the chance to sample some of the societies in TMDU, including the English Speaking Society, football club and chamber music group. It was certainly humbling to see the students' dedication and passion, both to their clubs and to their studies.

While we had to work extra hard on



With the TMDU students at their end of year conference.



After a night of karaoke with friends.

our projects due to the disruptions caused by the earthquake, we also had a chance to explore the stunning scenery that Japan has to offer. Weekend highlights included Hakone, where we spent a relaxing weekend, soaking in an onsen and sightseeing and Kamakura, where we all fell in love with the serene atmosphere and pristine temples. During the Easter holidays, our travel plans were significantly more hectic. The boys went skiing in Hakuba, whereas the girls visited the bathing snow monkeys in Jigokudani. We met up for a few days in Kansai before going our separate ways. Between us, we visited Hiroshima, Miyajima, the Hida mountains, Shikoku and Fuji-goko, to name just a few places.

We hope it is clear that we all had a wonderful time over the three months we spent in Japan and we would like to thank all of those at TMDU who made it possible. Coming back to London has been a real bore. Often (I think I can safely say) we find ourselves nostalgically remembering the good times in Tokyo. And it almost doesn't seem real anymore.

Luckily we have many photos and most importantly very fond memories and lasting friendships to remember and maintain the experience. And, of course, we are all fluent in Japanese now.