
Report of the 2008 American College of Surgeons Japan Traveling Fellow

by Sam M. Wiseman, MD, FACS, FRCSC

The objectives of my visit to Japan were to attend the 108th Congress of the Japan Surgical Society (JSS) in Nagasaki, stimulate scientific exchange, and develop new friendships and research collaborations. I was readily able to accomplish these objectives during the Japan Traveling Fellowship, with my wife Natalie eagerly accompanying me, and I am already planning a future visit.

Tokyo

I arrived in Tokyo before the JSS meeting to visit the Nippon Medical School where I was hosted by Prof. Kazuo Shimizu, MD, PhD, chairman of the department of surgery (see photo, this page). The first day of my visit was spent in the operating room (OR) with Professor Shimizu, where I had the opportunity to watch him carry out a thyroidectomy and neck dissection for cancer. I was very impressed with the intraoperative teaching and mentorship he gave to junior surgical staff, surgical residents, and medical students. It was in the OR with Professor Shimizu that I had my first opportunity to observe a lateral neck dissection in Japan. We also spoke at length about the extent of lymphadenectomy for thyroid cancer.



Dr. Wiseman with his host in Tokyo, Professor Shimizu.

Over lunch with junior staff, residents, and students, we had in-depth discussions on many interesting topics. I especially enjoyed learning about the use of adjuvant therapy for thyroid cancer in Japan. We also had the opportunity to discuss the video-assisted neck surgery approach to thyroid and parathyroid surgery, a technique that Professor Shimizu has pioneered.

I had the opportunity to tour the Nippon Medical School and visit the outpatient clinic,

inpatient wards, radiology, and the laboratory. Kiyomi Yamada Hames, MD, PhD, a clinical fellow in endocrine surgery who had recently returned from completing her research training in Boston, MA, was an excellent tour guide and taught me much about the medical system in Japan. It was thrilling to visit the beautiful Shinto shrine located just across the street from the medical school.

I also had the opportunity to meet and speak with many

endocrine surgeons and trainees at the school, including associate professors Haruki Akasu, MD, PhD, and Takehito Igarashi, MD, PhD; assistant professor Ritsuko Okamura, MD, PhD; and clinical fellow Tomoo Jikuzono, MD. Everyone was very friendly and welcoming and I was able to answer many questions for them regarding thyroid and parathyroid surgical surgery in Canada. I also had the pleasure of meeting and speaking with Koji Yamashita, MD, PhD, about his experience using a transaxillary retromammary, video-assisted breast surgery (VABS) approach for breast conservation surgery.

The weekend was spent sightseeing with Natalie in Tokyo, an incredibly large and diverse city with a very efficient and user-friendly mass transit system. Sightseeing highlights from the weekend included attending sumo wrestling matches in the Kokugikan arena, visiting the Asakusa Shrine and Tsukiji Fish Market, and exploring the Shinjuku, Ginza, and Shibuya areas. The Akihabara “Electric Town” was overwhelming, with more electronics on display and for sale than I could have ever imagined was possible.

The highlight of the weekend was an authentic Japanese meal hosted by Professor Shimizu in a beautiful venue located in a lush park in Tokyo. Many interesting discussions over dinner included the current surgical approach to parathyroid disease in Japan and minimally invasive surgi-



Dr. Wiseman with his host in Kobe, Professor Miyauchi.

cal management of adrenal tumors.

The following morning, I was warmly received at the Nippon Medical School surgical rounds and report. At rounds, I heard a very interesting presentation on VABS for in situ breast cancer and delivered a presentation on my research of molecular diagnostic markers for thyroid cancer. There were many interesting comments and questions and the discussion that followed was stimulating. Before my departure, I spoke with Professor Shimizu and Dr. Hames about several future collaborative research projects. After rounds, we were off to Kobe on the shinkansen (bullet train) that we found to be a fast and pleasant way to travel the country.

Kobe

The next stop was Kobe, where I visited the Kuma Hospital and was hosted by Prof. Akira Miyauchi, MD, PhD, director of the thyroid disease-focused medical center (see photo, this page). I attended the hospital’s morning conference where I very much enjoyed presentations on several topics that included musculoskeletal complaints experienced in patients with Graves disease and controversies related to poorly differentiated thyroid cancer.

Professor Miyauchi gave me a tour of the hospital, an impressive facility that provides multidisciplinary care for individuals diagnosed with thyroid disease. I spent the morning with Professor Miyauchi in his outpatient clinic, reviewing a

large number of patients with thyroid and parathyroid disease. The topics of discussion ranged from surgical management of medullary carcinoma to the unique experience at the Kuma Hospital of long-term surveillance for individuals diagnosed with papillary microcarcinoma.

The afternoon was spent in the OR observing several of the skilled surgeons at Kuma performing thyroid and parathyroid operations. This experience was interesting and very different from my experience in North America, as there were two operations going on simultaneously in each surgical theater, and doors between ORs allowed me to see several other thyroid operations occurring simultaneously. I observed several thyroidectomies for thyroid cancer, including several lymph node dissections, several thyroidectomies for goiter, and resection of a parathyroid carcinoma. All the endocrine surgeons were friendly and we had many discussions focused on technical aspects of their thyroid operations.

In the evening, there was a research mini-symposium at which several of the Kuma staff gave presentations of their work that would be presented at upcoming meetings. The presentation topics included poorly differentiated thyroid cancer and intrathyroid epithelial thymoma/carcinoma showing thymus-like differentiation lesions (an uncommon thyroid tumor originally described by Professor Miyauchi at Kuma Hospital).

I gave a presentation on mo-

lecular markers for improving thyroid cancer diagnosis at this symposium. The discussion was terrific and I answered several questions on my research that has focused on anaplastic thyroid cancer. It was a pleasure to meet and chat with Yasuhiro Ito, MD, an endocrine surgeon at Kuma who, like myself, has a research interest in thyroid cancer molecular biology.

Before my departure, I had the opportunity to speak further with Professor Miyauchi on several other topics, including a review of his technique of lateral mobilization of the recurrent laryngeal nerve to facilitate tracheal resection in patients with thyroid cancer invading the trachea near the ligament of Berry.

Kobe was a beautiful city and before Natalie and I left, we took a ride on the Shin-Kobe cable car to the top of a mountain that had a beautiful view of both the city and the sea.

Nagasaki

I then took the shinkansen and train to Nagasaki for the 108th annual congress of the JSS. The meeting began with the council dinner, where Natalie and I were warmly welcomed by the president, Prof. Takashi Kanematsu, MD, and Ms. Kanematsu. At this dinner, we were seated with several members of the society, including Prof. Koichi Tabayashi, MD, Prof. Hiroshi Takami, Prof. Akira Kawaguchi, and visiting pioneering cardiac surgeon/conference speaker Randas J.V. Batista, MD, of Brazil. I was introduced to the members of the

society as the representative of the American College of Surgeons. I was very proud and honored to represent the ACS at this event. I also met Thomas R. Russell, MD, FACS, ACS Executive Director, who was giving a lecture at the JSS congress, and Susumu Eguchi, MD, PhD, FACS, who had assisted me with planning my visit. After dinner, I was honored to be congratulated by many members of the society for being selected as the Traveling Fellow.

The JSS congress was held at the Nagasaki Brick Hall, a large conference center, and several meeting sessions were held in surrounding hotels. My personal highlights of the conference included the endocrine surgical session chaired by Shigeto Maeda, MD, PhD. I especially enjoyed a presentation given by Makoto Kamori, MD, PhD, of Tokyo, that evaluated the diagnostic utility of telomere length in follicular thyroid lesions.

As part of the congress, I also gave a lecture during this session on my research evaluating the molecular phenotype of differentiated thyroid cancer. My lecture generated an interesting discussion and several questions. Overall, it was encouraging for me to see that, like in North America, surgeon-scientists in Japan are carrying out excellent research.

Another highlight of the JSS for me was the minimally invasive thyroid surgery video session. Pioneers in a wide variety of minimally invasive approaches to thyroid surgery



Dr. Wiseman receiving a certificate commemorating his ACS Traveling Fellowship to Japan from Professor Takami on behalf of the Japan Surgical Society.

presented videos and discussed their operative techniques. I was impressed with the innovation, resourcefulness, and technical expertise evident in these videos. Other lectures and poster sessions I attended at the JSS congress further impressed me with the high level of scholarship maintained by Japanese surgeons. I especially enjoyed meeting several of the international JSS travel grant recipients, and it was a great honor being presented with a certificate from the JSS by Prof. Hiroshi Takami to commemorate my travelling fellow-

ship (see photo, this page).

Natalie and I very much enjoyed the informal dinner hosted by Shigeto Maeda, MD, PhD, and his colleagues from Nagasaki University, that allowed me to chat with many of the endocrine surgeons I had met on my trip, including Prof. Shimizu from Tokyo, Yasuhiro Ito from Kobe, Makoto Kamori from Tokyo, and others. I enjoyed speaking with Dr. Maeda about endocrine surgery in Nagasaki.

While visiting Nagasaki, we had the opportunity to visit several tourist sites and were

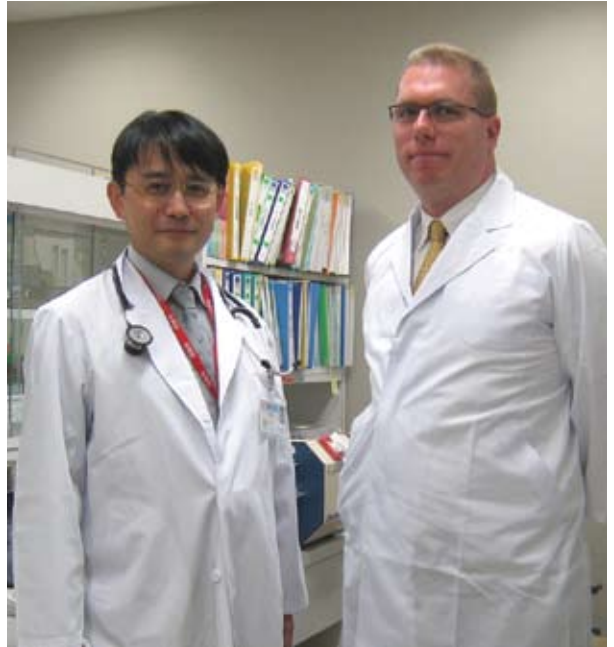
very moved by the Nagasaki atomic bomb museum and memorial.

Beppu

My next destination was the Noguchi Thyroid Clinic and Hospital in Beppu. Beppu is a quaint town known in Japan for its many natural hot springs. While visiting the Noguchi Hospital, I was hosted by Prof. Shiro Noguchi, MD, PhD, director of this medical center that, like Kuma, is focused on thyroid disease. I was greeted by Hitoshi Noguchi, MD, and Shiro Noguchi upon my arrival (see photos, page 53). Initially I toured around this facility and was shown the inpatient wards, outpatient department, radiology, and laboratory.

Afterward, Hitoshi Noguchi and I spoke at length about multiple issues related to the management of thyroid cancer. I learned that, like me, he had an interest in studying new treatments for anaplastic thyroid cancer and he shared with me the results of some of his recent study. I also gave a presentation of my research evaluating novel treatments for anaplastic thyroid cancer. This generated many questions, stimulated further discussion, and we decided that we would collaborate in the future on anaplastic thyroid cancer-related research projects.

I spent the afternoon observing several thyroid operations carried out by the skilled endocrine surgeons at the hospital. I observed several operations for both benign and malignant thyroid disease, including a locally advanced thyroid cancer, and it



Dr. Wiseman with his hosts in Beppu, Prof. Shiro Noguchi (left) and Dr. Hitoshi Noguchi.

was very exciting for me to see that for some thyroid surgeries, an electrothermal vessel sealing system was used.

At the end of the day, I had an opportunity to speak with Shiro Noguchi on several topics including the management of papillary microcarcinoma, and how he had recently reported that tumors between 6 mm and 10 mm behave in a fashion similar to larger tumors. We also discussed the extent of lymphadenectomy for thyroid cancer.

The multidisciplinary conference that followed reviewed many interesting cases and I was impressed with the high level of scholarship displayed at this meeting. Beppu was a beautiful city and before our

departure, we had the opportunity to visit their famous natural hot springs.

Reflections

On the way to the airport in Osaka, we visited the atomic bomb memorial in Hiroshima and spent a day touring Kyoto, one of the most beautiful cities I have ever seen. The impressive beauty of the many shrines and gardens in Kyoto really must be seen to be believed. My visit to Japan was a very busy but a wonderful experience for Natalie and me. I found all my Japanese colleagues to be fantastic hosts and their technical expertise, academic focus, and science to be at a very high level. I wholeheartedly thank the American College of Surgeons

for the great honor of serving as its representative and giving me the opportunity to visit several excellent Japanese surgical centers, to exchange ideas, to learn, and to develop new academic collaborations and friendships.

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