

Bridging Borders: My Yamamuro-Ogihara Fellowship Experience

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In the Philippines, pediatric orthopaedics is a dynamic but evolving field. While we have made strides in addressing common conditions such as developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH), clubfoot, and skeletal dysplasias, many areas still lack access to advanced diagnostic tools and specialized surgical care. As one of the few subspecialty-trained pediatric orthopaedic surgeons in the country, I am acutely aware of the need for continuous learning and collaboration to ensure the best possible outcomes for our patients. Being selected for the prestigious Yamamuro-Ogihara Fellowship of the Japanese Pediatric Orthopaedic Association (JPOA) was not only an honor but also an invaluable opportunity to expand my knowledge and refine my skills, with the ultimate goal of bringing these lessons back to the Philippines to guide my practice and contribute to the advancement of pediatric orthopaedic care.

The Yamamuro-Ogihara Fellowship of the JPOA is a prestigious program designed to foster cross-cultural exchange and learning among pediatric orthopaedic surgeons. As a fellow, I had the privilege of observing expert clinicians and surgeons, participating in advanced procedures, and attending a major academic conference. My journey took me to esteemed institutions, including the **Hyogo Prefectural Kobe Children's Hospital**, where I gained invaluable insights into the practice of pediatric orthopaedics in Japan.



Hyogo Prefectural Kobe Children's Hospital

The fellowship began at **Hyogo Prefectural Kobe Children's Hospital**, where I spent the first day immersed in outpatient clinics (OPD). The morning session with **Dr. Kobayashi** offered a comprehensive introduction to his meticulous clinical approach, including cases such as Nail-

Patella Syndrome and Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease. His emphasis on holistic care and precise diagnosis set a high standard. The afternoon with **Dr. Kinugasa** provided further exposure to diverse pediatric conditions, including Cornelia de Lange syndrome and Fibular Hemimelia, demonstrating her calm expertise and thorough patient assessments.



First OPD day with Dr. Kobayashi, Dr. Kinugasa, and Dr. Kitamura



Special pillow used in taking the hip ultrasound for DDH screening

On the second day, I was able to observe in the OPD and the operating room (OR). The morning was spent with **Dr. Sakata** and **Dr. Morishita**, tackling complex cases like Multiple Exostoses and limb length discrepancy (LLD) post-guided growth. The collaborative discussions were

highly educational. In the afternoon, I observed **Dr. Kinugasa** and **Dr. Arimoto** perform a guided growth procedure for bilateral genu valgum, inserting 8-plates on the medial femur and tibia with impressive precision and efficiency.



Mural in the Operating Room featuring Disney characters

The third day focused on advanced surgeries. The morning featured a complex procedure led by **Dr. Kobayashi**, **Dr. Kitamura**, and **Dr. Morishita** involving soft tissue lengthening, tibialis anterior tendon transfer (TATT), and talonavicular reduction with pinning for clubfoot recurrence. This surgery exemplified the hospital's advanced capabilities and collaborative approach. In the afternoon, the removal of implants for lateral condyle pseudarthrosis highlighted the importance of meticulous post-operative care. A team conference followed, providing a deeper understanding of the decision-making process in complex cases. The day concluded with a warm **Welcome Dinner**, hosted by the Orthopaedic Department of Hyogo Prefectural Kobe Children's Hospital, fostering camaraderie and meaningful exchanges with colleagues whilst enjoying the best food and drink that Kobe has to offer.



Observing a surgery for clubfoot recurrence



Pre-operative conference



Welcome dinner with the Pediatric Orthopaedic surgeons of Hyogo Prefectural Kobe Children's Hospital

On the fourth day, I visited **Sakai City Medical Center** in Osaka with **Dr. Sugita**, where I observed their innovative workflows and technological integration, further expanding my perspective on pediatric orthopaedic care. That evening, I attended a **Welcome Dinner** organized by the **Sakai-Philippine Exchange Association**, which comprised mostly members of the Filipino community in Sakai City. This heartfelt gathering allowed me to connect with fellow Filipinos, exchanging stories and learning about their lives in Japan. Their warm hospitality and shared

pride in our culture made the evening especially memorable and underscored the strength of community bonds abroad.



Visit to Sakai City Medical Center



Welcome dinner with the Filipino Community of the Sakai-Philippine Exchange Association organized by Dr. Sugita

The weekend provided an opportunity to explore the vibrant city of Kobe. I visited **Harborland**, a bustling waterfront area filled with shops and restaurants, and took a peaceful stroll through **Meriken Park**, where modern art installations and views of the Kobe Port Tower created a serene atmosphere. A visit to **Nankinmachi (Kobe Chinatown)** offered a lively cultural experience, with delicious food and colorful streets. The highlight was the **Nunobiki Herb Garden**, where I enjoyed panoramic views of the city and the lush, fragrant gardens that made for a relaxing and rejuvenating break.



Exploring Kobe during the weekend (Kobe Chinatown - Nankinmachi, Nunobiki Herb Garden, Meriken Park, and Harborland)

Returning to Hyogo Prefectural Kobe Children's Hospital on the fifth day, I observed the removal of screws following a modified Salter osteotomy for DDH. The afternoon OPD with **Dr. Kobayashi**

included cases such as Achondroplasia and Down Syndrome, with discussions on C1-C2 instability screening and long-term management strategies.

Day six continued with OPD sessions, starting with **Dr. Kobayashi** in the morning and **Dr. Kinugasa** in the afternoon. These sessions highlighted efficient screening techniques for conditions like scoliosis (Moire imaging for school-aged children at 11–12 years) and DDH (ultrasound at 1 and 4 months for high-risk infants). The seventh day combined OPD with a notable surgical procedure for Fibular Hemimelia. The surgery, performed by **Dr. Kobayashi**, **Dr. Kitamura**, and **Dr. Arimoto**, involved distal tibiofibular cross-union with screws and iliac crest bone graft (ICBG). Their attention to detail and focus on functional outcomes were exceptional.

Throughout my stay in Hyogo Prefectural Kobe Children's Hospital, I encountered fascinating cases and interesting diagnostic and management techniques which furthered my knowledge in pediatric orthopaedics. I was in awe of the capability of their Prosthetics and Orthotics Section to produce prostheses and orthoses with a lead time of just 1–2 weeks. This truly reflected the institutions' commitment to patient-centered care.



With the Pediatric Orthopaedic surgeons of the Hyogo Prefectural Kobe Children's Hospital (Seated L-R: Dr. Kobayashi, Dr. Flores, Dr. Sakata; Standing L-R: Dr. Arimoto, Dr. Kinugasa, Dr. Morishita, and Dr. Kitamura)

On the eighth day, I traveled to Fukuoka for the Japanese Pediatric Orthopaedic Association (JPOA) Annual Conference. The evening began with the **President's Banquet**, where I had the opportunity to network with international fellows and faculty.



President's Banquet

The conference was a highlight of the fellowship. On the first day, **Prof. Cho Tae-Joon** delivered a compelling lecture on skeletal dysplasia, offering innovative diagnostic and therapeutic perspectives. **Prof. Wu Kuan Wen** also shared his learning journey in Early Onset Scoliosis Surgery which we can learn from and apply in our practice. During the **International Fellows Session**, I had the honor of presenting my paper alongside the other traveling fellows. This session highlighted the importance of global knowledge exchange and allowed me to share insights from my practice while learning from the experiences of others. That evening, I attended the **Banquet Dinner**, where I had the opportunity to reconnect with **Dr. Kinoshita**, whom I had met during my Clubfoot Ponseti Mentorship Program at the University of Iowa in 2019. Our reunion underscored the importance of fostering bonds and sustaining international collaborations, which serve as vital platforms for the continuous growth and exchange of ideas in pediatric orthopaedics.



Presentation during the International Fellows session



During the International Fellows session



With Dr. Kinoshita

The second day of the conference featured an engaging lecture on Legg-Calvé-Perthes Disease by **Prof. Kim Hui Taek**, which deepened my understanding of the disease's progression and management strategies. The conference fostered an atmosphere of collaboration, providing invaluable opportunities for learning and professional growth.

The guiding principle of the fellowship, **“Decision is more important than incision,”** resonated throughout my experience, emphasizing the critical role of thoughtful planning and collaboration. This journey not only enriched my understanding of pediatric orthopaedics but also inspired me with the dedication, precision, and innovation demonstrated by my mentors. As I return to the Philippines, I am committed to applying these invaluable lessons to improve local practices, foster collaboration, and provide the best possible care to our pediatric patients. This fellowship has truly been a transformative experience, and its impact on my practice will be long-lasting.