

## Viewpoints

# My training experience in Japan

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Most of the dermatologists in Hong Kong have their overseas training in the United Kingdom and the United States. I am the very first one who has been trained in Japan. In this light viewpoint article, I share with readers what I have seen during my training three years ago in the Department of Dermatology, Keio University School of Medicine in Tokyo.

In Hong Kong, we have to undergo three years of internal medicine training and examinations before formal specialist training as dermatologist and venereologist. In Japan, after graduation from medical school, all doctors will undergo two years of rotation in various specialties before they finally choose their own specialty of interest. Dermatology and Venereology specialties are combined as in Hong Kong. Being hospital and university affiliated, there are huge differences between my training hospital in Japan as compared with Social Hygiene Service in Hong Kong.

On the clinical side, besides general dermatology outpatient clinics, they have various subspecialty clinics dealing with various diseases such as

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pemphigus, connective tissue diseases or hair disorders. Their outpatient workload is just as heavy as ours. In Hong Kong, we have to see patients on our own, no matter whether we are trained dermatologists or not. But in Japan, there are several residents seeing the patients together with the professor in clinics. These residents help in various aspects like computer entry, cryosurgery, changing wound dressing, clinical photos, skin scrapping and microscopy, and at the same time they can learn by seeing the cases together with the professor. This is in contrast with our practice in Hong Kong where we delegate some of the jobs like clinical photos, cryotherapy, skin scrapping and microscopy to our nurses. Being hospital affiliated, they have a greater bed number than ours and they are trained to perform more complicated procedures like skin grafting. They have clinical conference held every week, with live patient demonstration. Their conference is a little bit different from ours. All the slides and records are available before the conference for everyone to study. Thus everybody have the chance to prepare or study the literature before the clinical conference. The residents have to prepare to present the clinical history and pathology, but a formal literature review is only optional. After that the senior staffs will take turn to express their opinion on the diagnosis or management of individual cases. In this way, all the difficult or rare cases will be known to all members of the department. This facilitates not only learning by residents but also the collection of rare cases for future publication. Being university affiliated, their investigations were sometimes backed up by more

sophisticated ones such as electron microscopy or gene study.

Although they have pathology department in their hospital, they also have indepth pathology study by themselves, unlike the setting in Hong Kong. Every week, the associate professor, who is a clinical dermatologist with special interest in dermatopathology, will hold a conference after office hours. He will study all the histopathology slides taken in the previous week, together with departmental residents. Although not all the slides are difficult ones, by studying a large number of slides each week, the residents have a better exposure to dermatopathology than we do. The department is well equipped with teaching microscopes and microscopes for taking digital photos. All of us know that most Japanese are hard working. I have asked one of first year residents on her working hours. She told me that about 50% of time, she could go home at around 8pm but for another 50%, she could only finish her job at 11-12pm. We are rather fortunate in Hong Kong as we have only two conferences per month after office hours.

As a renowned university, basic research, in addition to clinical ones, is a necessity. There are several laboratories in the department. I worked in the laboratory investigating the pathophysiology of pemphigus and staphylococcal scalded skin syndrome. At that time, there were two full time research fellows in that laboratory, one was a veterinarian and another was a dentist. There were several other part time researchers who were clinical dermatologists and worked in the laboratory when they had free sessions and on Saturday or Sunday. Most of them had been enrolled in the PhD courses. One research staff was sent from a Japanese cosmetic company to study PhD course, although his project was on pemphigus which was not related to the cosmetic industry. Basic research was highly supported in the department, if you had the will to do it. I had worked with three students, who volunteered to

work in the laboratory during their undergraduate training. And one of them actually had published one paper in the Journal of Investigative Dermatology before he joined the dermatology department! As outsiders, we only see their success after their publication. But it is difficult to describe in words the sacrifice they have made: the long working hours, the frustrations, uncertainty or helplessness when they cannot get the proper results, etc. Because not all experiment worked finally, everyone had more than one project at his hand, hoping that at least one of them could be successful. I could only comment that life was not easy as a researcher but if you could finally accomplish a good job, the satisfaction could be enormous.

Overseas training is an invaluable experience for every doctor. We can see a different disease spectrum in foreign countries, learn their technique in investigating and managing various illnesses and the delivery of specialist care including subspecialty clinics. It can broaden our vision and mind on the scope of dermatology, far beyond what we can learn from textbook or journals. In addition, we can cultivate new friendship and experience the culture of foreign countries. To conclude, I share with readers the word of wisdom from the Emeritus Professor of Dermatology while I was having dinner with him in the very first week of my training, "What you give is what you can get." Thus how much you can learn in the training depends very much on the effort you put in and I think this applies also to our dermatology trainees as well.

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