

## Sasakawa Nursing Fellow 2022 Progress Report

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03/18/2023

### **Purpose and Overview**

This mid-term report serves as a summary of my academic and personal progress during the graduate program, from admission to March 2023, as a recipient of the study abroad scholarship of Sasakawa Nursing Fellow.

I am currently majoring Population Health Sciences at Duke university. Population health sciences is a field that focuses on studying the health outcomes of a group of individuals, while also considering the societal and environmental aspects influencing these outcomes. This field also explores health equity, as well as the policies and interventions that connect these various elements<sup>1</sup>. Thus, population health takes a comprehensive approach to healthcare that considers the broader social, economic, and environmental factors that impact health outcomes, prevention science, and community health.

### **Academic Aspect**

My primary goal for the first year was to gain a comprehensive understanding of population health and the methods used to obtain and analyze relevant data. The curriculum provided by the department has been very organized and has helped me to deepen my understanding of the subject matter. The first and second semesters comprised of the same classes, including analytic methods, statistical programming, research design and study, and topics in population health. In addition to those population health-related classes, I am also taking professional development and English classes.

Learning about population health in the US has broadened my perspective on health, particularly since the demographic and ethnic make-up of the US is very different from that of Japan. In contrast to other developed countries including Japan that have adopted universal healthcare systems, the US healthcare system is largely driven by private insurance companies. This has resulted in significant disparities in access to care and health outcomes among different racial and ethnic groups in the US, with communities of color experiencing poorer health outcomes and higher rate of chronic diseases. As someone from Japan, which is a homogeneous country with a different healthcare system, I may not have been aware of these disparities if I had not studied in the US.

Through my studies, I have gained a deeper understanding of the differences between the healthcare systems in the US and Japan. I believe that it is important for each country to find its own way to improve healthcare based on its unique circumstances, such as differences in population size, demographics, nation land size, ethnicity, belief of ideology, politics, and so on. Simply imitating successful systems in other countries may not be effective or sustainable. I am grateful for the

opportunity to study population health sciences in the US, which has allowed me to gain a more global perspective on healthcare.

### **Living Aspect**

One of my primary goals for my study abroad experience was to explore the diverse lifestyle options available in the US and to broaden my horizons through cultural immersion. The US offers a vast array of choices due to its size, diversity, and entrepreneurial spirit. It is a large country with 50 states, each with its own unique geography, history, and culture. The entrepreneurial spirit of the American people has also contributed to this diversity, as many individuals and businesses have created new products, services, and innovations, leading to a proliferation of lifestyle choices for consumers. As I grew up in Japan, where there are often many invisible cultural regulations and rules that govern many aspects of life, I was drawn to the idea of having a wide range of choices and freedoms in the US.

However, this vast array of choices is not equally accessible to all individuals due to social inequalities. In particular, income inequality, differences in resources and education levels across regions, and systemic discrimination can create barriers that limit people's ability to exercise free choice and access the same lifestyle options as others. Moreover, making the right choices often requires knowledge and education, which may not be equally accessible to all individuals. Thus, the freedom to choose comes with the responsibility to make informed and ethical decisions, which can be a challenge in a society where access to information and education is not equal.

My experience living in the US has taught me that freedom and choice come with their own set of challenges and responsibilities, which can be a refreshing change from the strict regulations and rules that govern many aspects of life in Japan. Furthermore, my time in the US, I have also come to appreciate the importance of valuing and celebrating diversity, both as individuals and as a society. Just as each person has their own unique experiences and perspectives, each country has its own cultural traditions and values that shape the lives of its citizens. Recognizing and embracing this diversity is essential to building a more inclusive and understanding world.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Ssakawa Health Foundation for the generous scholarship that has enabled me to pursue my academic goals at Duke University and has provided me with opportunities that I could not have otherwise imagined. The exceptional professors, supportive cohorts and community, and outstanding resources at Duke have not only challenged me intellectually but have also helped me grow personally.

1) Silberberg M, Martinez-Bianchi V, Lyn MJ. What Is Population Health? *Prim Care*. 2019 Dec;46(4):475-484. doi: 10.1016/j.pop.2019.07.001. Epub 2019 Jul 31. PMID: 31655744.