

Sasakawa Nursing Fellow 2024 Progress Report

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1. Introduction

I am a second-year Master of Public Health (MPH) student in the Global Health Department (GH) at Emory University. The first-year curriculum mainly consisted of core required courses, but in my second year, I focused on deepening my learning in areas of personal interest. Specifically, I pursued the Humanitarian Health Emergencies (CHE) Certificate course and learned practical approaches to emergency public health from professors at Emory and specialists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). I also worked for about six months as an intern at the Global Public Health Emergency Branch at the CDC, during which I spent six weeks in Indonesia working with local partners on field activities. In my final semester, I undertook a capstone project related to vaccines. Through these experiences, I have worked toward achieving my personal and professional goals.

2. The objectives and their progress

I am pursuing three specific objectives in my second-year studies at Emory University. The specific goals and their progress are as follows:

Objective 1: Gaining Practical Public Health Experience

With a growing interest in international humanitarian assistance from the perspective of a government agency, I interned for approximately six months during the summer at the CDC's Global Public Health Emergency Branch, contributing to the Mitigation of Emergent Threats for Pregnancy and Infant Linked Outcome Initiatives (MET-PILOT) project in Indonesia. I spent six weeks in Semarang, Java, collaborating with public health graduate students and faculty at Diponegoro University to improve maternal and newborn health outcomes. Together, we visited healthcare facilities and developed a baseline assessment tool through field data collection and community engagement.

As part of this process, I conducted a literature review and presented our findings at the International Conference on Public Health for Tropical and Coastal Development (ICOPH-TCD) in 2025. Feedback from local partners and conference participants was instrumental in refining the tool. Additionally, I served as a workshop facilitator when the MET-PILOT project was launched as a multi-sectoral collaboration between the United Nations, the Indonesian government, universities, NGOs, and hospitals. This experience provided valuable insight into how organizations can work together to address shared public health challenges. This experience strengthened my cross-cultural collaboration and research skills and deepened my understanding of how US governmental agencies contribute to global maternal and newborn health initiatives.

Objective 2: Enhancing Technical Expertise and Applied Skills in Public Health Practice

For my capstone project, I enrolled in the course "Evidence-Based Decision-Making for Immunizations" to deepen my understanding of research-informed policy development. This decision was motivated by both my academic interest in evidence-based policymaking and my prior experience encountering a situation in which policy recommendations were likely needed for a newly arrived refugee population with low vaccination coverage.

One key assignment involved analyzing an Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) meeting summary, in which I critically reflected on the committee's consideration of new data and guidance related to Mpox vaccination for high-risk populations. I also examined areas where the recommendations appeared incomplete or insufficiently addressed. Another assignment required me to explore the reversal of the 1998 U.S. recommendation for the first-generation rotavirus vaccine following reports of serious adverse events¹. I assumed the role of a stakeholder from Honduras, a lower-middle-income country, and assessed the feasibility of introducing the rotavirus vaccine by considering disease burden, health system capacity, and resource constraints.

To strengthen my epidemiological and statistical skills, I completed both core courses and specialized electives through the CHE Certificate program. In particular, the course "Epidemiological Methods in Humanitarian Emergencies" provided a foundation for epidemiologic approaches used in complex emergency settings, including rapid assessments, surveillance systems, and survey design. Through simulation exercises based on real-world disaster and infectious disease outbreak scenarios, I gained practical skills applicable to field settings.

In addition to these subject-specific courses, I enhanced my technical competencies by completing "Introduction to R", "Introduction to GIS", "Quantitative Methods", and "Program Cycle 2: Monitoring & Evaluation of Global Health Programs". These courses enabled me to strengthen my methodological skills and apply them across diverse areas of global public health practice.

Objective 3: Strengthening Cross-Cultural Communication Skills

To achieve this objective, I actively engaged with individuals from diverse cultural and social backgrounds. Emory University is located in a neighborhood outside central Atlanta, and I found churches seem often serve as central community hubs. As part of the

CHE Certificate, I was required to volunteer with vulnerable populations. I chose to participate in Peace Volunteers, a free training community that inspires intercultural growth through cultural humility and language exchange. There, I regularly assist with event setup and cleanup and had opportunities to interact with people from various backgrounds.

Through these experiences, I listened to stories about the challenges and joys of life in the U.S. from individuals with diverse backgrounds. These conversations allowed me to connect not as a provider of support, but as a fellow human being—broadening my perspective beyond my prior experiences as a nurse in the humanitarian aid field. These interactions taught me the value of mutual understanding and deepened my awareness of the complex realities people face in everyday life.

At the same time, with the inauguration of President Trump's second administration, there has been a noticeable shift toward the exclusion of diversity². Living and studying at Emory University—a place that values inclusion—has made me more aware of the importance of practicing cultural humility and grounding support efforts in the voices and needs of those most affected. However, this election and the broader societal shifts it reflected also deepened my awareness that struggles and vulnerabilities can exist across all segments of society, often in complex and less visible ways. I realized that listening to these voices and engaging in open dialogue with all communities is equally important. This awareness may be applicable to the context of Japan as well, where issues of inclusion and identity are also evolving.

3. Conclusion

My MPH studies at Emory University have provided me with practical and interdisciplinary training in global public health, including emergency response, policy analysis, and cross-cultural collaboration. These experiences, particularly my internship at the CDC and fieldwork in Indonesia, have strengthened my ability to adapt and apply evidence-based approaches in diverse and evolving contexts.

With less than two months remaining until graduation, I remain committed to my studies, including the completion of my capstone project. I will continue to engage sincerely with both my academic work and conversations with people from diverse backgrounds, so that I can grow further and one day contribute meaningfully to public health efforts in Japan.

4. Acknowledgments

I am sincerely grateful to the Sasakawa Health Foundation for their generous

support, which has made it possible for me to pursue my MPH studies at Emory University. Their financial assistance, along with the valuable academic guidance and life advice they have provided, has given me the confidence and opportunity to advance my learning and continue exploring both global and local health issues relevant to Japan.

Reference

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2. Green, E. L., & Montague, Z. (2025, February 14). Trump cracks down on diversity initiatives celebrated in his first term. *The New York Times*.
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