

Sasakawa Nursing Fellowship Progress Report 2025

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Florence S. Downs PhD in Nursing Research and Theory Development

April 11, 2026

## **1. Introduction**

This report outlines my academic progression and professional experiences during my first year as a PhD student at NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing for the 2025 fiscal year. It highlights key learnings from the doctoral curriculum, extracurricular engagements, and the professional networks established during this period. Furthermore, it details my research objectives and goals for the forthcoming academic year.

## **2. Background**

My research focuses on optimizing nursing work environments to facilitate equitable, patient-centered care for linguistically diverse populations. Specifically, I investigate the experiences of bedside nurses in acute care settings who manage heart failure patients with limited English proficiency. My motivation stems from my clinical background as a cardiac nurse, where I served as the sole bilingual provider, witnessing firsthand the systemic barriers faced by both patients and staff.

My professional trajectory is further shaped by my upbringing in dual cultural contexts and my fieldwork with the Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA), an NGO supporting migrants and travelers in Japan seeking healthcare. My "North Star" is to foster a healthcare system where one, including those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), can receive compassionate, safe, and timely care. Ultimately, I aim to serve as a nurse scientist and global health professional who bridges the gap between clinical practice, rigorous research, and equitable policy.

### 3. Curriculum

The first year emphasized foundational coursework designed to prepare students for the preliminary examination and subsequent dissertation research.

**Fall 2025:** Courses included *Philosophical & Theoretical Perspectives of Nursing*, *Contemporary Design & Methods I*, *Biostatistics*, *Conceptual Approaches to Health Equity*, and *PhD Forum I*.

**Spring 2026:** Courses included *Large Databases in Applied Research*, *Contemporary Design & Method II*, *Synthesis of Evidence*, *Qualitative Methods*, and *PhD Forum II*.

#### 3.1 Key Academic Reflections

##### ***Philosophical & Theoretical Perspectives of Nursing:***

This course examined the historical development of the philosophy of science in relation to the evolution of nursing as a discipline and the advancement of nursing knowledge, including theory development and its application to research and practice. Through this course, I developed a deeper understanding of diverse philosophical perspectives and their critical role in conducting and evaluating rigorous scientific inquiry. In particular, gaining clarity on my own ontological, epistemological, and axiological positions has informed how I conceptualize research questions and, consequently, how I design and implement research studies.

##### ***Qualitative Methods for Health & Healthcare Research:***

This introductory course covered key components of qualitative research, including research design, data collection, data analysis, criteria for rigor, and ethical considerations such

as informed consent. As my first formal exposure to qualitative methods, the course provided an important foundation and broadened my methodological perspective. Engaging in hands-on exercises, such as interviewing, coding, and observation, enhanced my understanding of the practical and theoretical considerations involved in designing qualitative studies. For my final paper, I applied a critical ethnographic approach to investigate a research problem aligned with my interests.

***Conceptual Approaches to Health Equity:***

This course examined current issues and debates surrounding health equity, health disparities, and health vulnerability. Discussions extended to the application of health equity concepts across diverse populations, including institutionalized individuals, people with disabilities, children, pregnant women, immigrants, and older adults. The course content closely aligned with the core of my research mission.

Unlike courses focused primarily on building foundational knowledge and research methodologies, this course emphasized the application of research beyond traditional dissemination channels such as publications and conference presentations. Faculty encouraged us to consider how research can be translated into meaningful action and policy change. This perspective resonated with my view of research being only a tool, but a tool that when used effectively, can drive tangible improvements in health equity.

The final assignment involved developing and presenting a proposal for a community health initiative to a public health agency or healthcare organization, including outreach to relevant stakeholders for feedback. For this project, I proposed a “Nurse-Led Language Equity Response Team: Improving Cardiometabolic Equity in NYC” to the New York State Department

of Health. Through engaging with multiple stakeholders, I gained valuable insights and formed meaningful professional connections that I intend to build upon in my future work.

### ***PhD Forum I/ PhD Forum II:***

These courses were designed to support PhD students in successfully navigating their doctoral training by fostering self-management skills, developing strategies for building effective mentor-mentee relationships, and setting both short- and long-term goals. The courses also introduced diverse career pathways for nurse scientists and expanded students' knowledge, skills, and strategies for developing research-focused careers in nursing science.

Through presentations and panel discussions, speakers illustrated how doctoral competencies can be applied across a wide range of professional roles. A key theme that emerged was that career decisions are also often shaped by individual priorities and life circumstances. Engaging with these perspectives helped me reflect on how I would like to approach my own doctoral training, while also encouraging me to remain both intentional and adaptable in planning my career trajectory. Their experiences were both inspiring and reassuring, strengthening my motivation and optimism as I continue my doctoral journey and consider future career possibilities.

### **3.2 Outside of the required courses**

In addition to required coursework, I have engaged in several academic and professional development activities that support my progression as a PhD student. These include preparation for the preliminary examination, participation in academic conferences, and involvement in

structured mentorship programs to strengthen my scholarly writing. The following sections provide an overview of these activities and their contributions to my development.

***Preliminary Examination:***

The preliminary examination is designed to assess students' ability to critically analyze and synthesize literature from nursing and related disciplines within a defined area of research. It serves as a key milestone to demonstrate the integration of knowledge and skills gained through coursework, as well as readiness to advance to dissertation work. As part of this process, I will conduct an integrative review on perceived barriers to care and approaches to improving care for heart failure patients with limited language proficiency.

***Eastern Nursing Research Society (ENRS) Conference:***

The Eastern Nursing Research Society (ENRS) is dedicated to advancing nursing science by fostering a community of researchers and scholars in the eastern United States. The 2026 annual conference was held in Boston from March 25–27. Although I did not present this year, I attended with the goal of expanding my knowledge and building professional connections. While only one oral presentation directly aligned with my research focus, I gained broader insights into healthcare services research, particularly through sessions on nursing workforce topics. The poster presentations, on the other hand, had several that were closely related to my area of interest, and I took the initiative to connect with these researchers. Through these experiences, I successfully expanded my professional network and established connections that I intend to further develop throughout my doctoral training.

***Writing Mentorship Program:***

This program supports the development of scholarly voice and professional writing skills in preparation for dissertation work and manuscript publication. First-year PhD students are prioritized and matched with alumni mentors for individualized guidance. I am honored to be mentored by Dr. Eileen M. Sullivan-Marx. Our weekly meetings have been instrumental in refining my academic writing and have also facilitated connections with established scholars in my field.

**4. Academic Progress**

Alongside my PhD curriculums and main research for my PhD degree, I started a new research project, worked on publishing my first research paper, and took part in the translation process for the 2025 edition of the State of the world's nursing by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Council of Nurses (ICN).

**Peer Reviewed Posters:**

- **\*Kotani M.**, Roche-Dean M., Li C., Cao Xi, Squires A. (2026, May) Service Utilization and Care Barriers for Multilingual Immigrant Older Adults with Cognitive Impairment In Long-Term Care Settings: A Scoping Review. *AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting 2026*, Seattle, the United States.

Under the guidance of my advisor, Dr. Allison Squires, and in collaboration with Dr. Maria Roche-Dean (Grand Valley State University), I led this scoping review to identify systemic barriers to quality care for multilingual populations. The project was accepted for presentation on May 31, 2026.

### **Publications under Review:**

- **Kotani, M.**, Sasaki, M., Fujiyoshi-Ito, A., Yonekura, Y., Ogata, Y. (under review). *Managers' leadership empowers nurses' creativity: intrinsic motivation acts as a means of meditation.*

I am currently revising my master's thesis for publication in collaboration with my former research team at the Institute of Science Tokyo. Dr. Eileen M. Sullivan-Marx has provided invaluable mentorship on navigating the scholarly publication process.

### **International Reports & Collaboration:**

- **World Health Organization.** (2025). *State of the World's Nursing 2025: Investing in Education, Jobs, Leadership and Service Delivery*

I served as a member of the Japanese translation team, responsible for reviewing and verifying content. This project was a collaborative effort involving the Sasakawa Health Foundation, the National Center for Global Health and Medicine (NCGM), and several distinguished academic leaders in Japan.

### **Professional Dissemination & Public Engagement:**

- **Kotani, M.** (2025, November). The New Normal. *AMDA International Medical Information Center News Letter*, (115).
- **Kotani, M.** (2026, April). Care Beyond Language and Cultural Barriers: Health Disparities Seen Through Nursing Research. *AMDA International Medical Information Center News Letter*, (116).

Through these columns, I aim to bridge the gap between academic research and public awareness, specifically addressing health equity and the challenges faced by culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations.

## 5. Other Activities

Across the year I registered to attend multiple events. Following are examples of them.

- Shaping Global Health Policy through Nursing Leadership: Partnerships and Solutions for a Healthier World, a parallel session to the United Nations 80th General Assembly and the High-Level Meeting 4 on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases
- AI in Public Health: Transforming Care, Communities, and Classrooms
- Networking Reception: Connecting with International Alumni
- Career Conversations: International Public Health Careers
- Advocacy Education Day: Empowering Nurses to Shape Healthcare Policy
- Center for Global Development event “Aid Cuts: How Should Major Countries Priorities?”
- Global Launch: WHO curriculum guide for community health workers

## 6. Goals for the Second Year

Upon successful completion of the preliminary exam, my second-year objectives include:

**Skill Acquisition:** Mastering grant writing and initiating my PhD dissertation proposal.

**Interdisciplinary Study:** Enrolling in elective courses focused on sociology, health policy, and economics.

**Dissemination:** I aim to actively disseminate my research through peer-reviewed publications, international conferences, and professional outlets. In addition, I am committed to sharing findings with broader, non-academic audiences including patients, communities, and practitioners through accessible formats such as public talks, community engagement initiatives, and practice-oriented publications.

## 7. Conclusion

My first year at NYU has provided a rigorous foundation in nursing science and expanded my global professional network. Through diverse experiences both inside and outside the classroom, I have gained valuable skills and formed meaningful connections. As I move into my second year, I am eager to build on these experiences and further develop as a PhD student and researcher.

## 8. Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Sasakawa Health Foundation for their unwavering support. The experiences I have gained since becoming a fellow at Sasakawa Foundation and since I moved to New York in the fall have greatly enriched my knowledge, broadened my perspective, and enhanced my critical and analytical thinking. I remain committed to thriving in this program and contributing to the transformation of healthcare systems and health equity in Japan, the United States, and beyond.