ASUNARO Award and Pediatric Dentistry Exchange Visit to Japan

Report on the JSPD Symposium and ASUNARO Pediatric Dental Clinic Visit

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As a recipient of the 2026 ASUNARO Award, I had the opportunity to attend the Japanese Society of Pediatric Dentistry (JSPD) meeting and exchange experiences with colleagues from Japan and Taiwan. After presenting in Okinawa, I traveled to Tokyo and Toyama and visited ASUNARO Pediatric Dental Clinic to learn about its approach to the dental environment and oral health education for children. The program gave me an opportunity to present my research as a resident and to consider familiar clinical concerns from a different perspective.

The question that stayed with me most was how children remember a dental visit. Completing treatment doe s not fully describe their experience. Their anxiety, their relationship with the dental team, and their expectat ions of the next appointment also matter. Seeing the spaces and activities at ASUNARO encouraged me to thi nk about the child's experience before and after treatment, as well as during the procedure itself.

This report follows the main activities of the visit and records my reflections on the symposium and clinic tou r. It focuses particularly on involving children in oral hygiene education, helping them develop positive memo ries of dental care, and sustaining professional exchange among pediatric dentists in Korea, Japan, and Taiwa n.

May 20 and 21 Conference and Presentation in Okinawa

After arriving in Okinawa on May 20, I stayed at Laguna Garden Hotel and prepared for my presentation the f ollowing day. Presenting to pediatric dentistry colleagues abroad, outside the familiar setting of my departm ent and hospital, made me pay close attention to both the organization of my research and the clarity of my explanation. To describe the background, objectives, and principal findings within the allotted time, I first nee ded to identify the central message I wanted the audience to take away.



On May 21, I presented as an ASUNARO Award recipient at the Inter national Symposium of the JSPD meeting at Okinawa Convention Ce nter. When conducting research, I tend to concentrate on methodol ogical details and the accuracy of the results. A presentation also re quires an explanation of why the study is needed and why its finding s matter. This experience reminded me that understanding my own research and making it understandable to others require different ki nds of preparation.

It was meaningful to participate in an academic session with pediatr ic dentistry colleagues from other countries. Although our language s and clinical settings differed, we shared an interest in helping child ren receive safe dental care and maintain their oral health. The expe rience encouraged me to consider more carefully which questions in everyday pediatric dental practice my future research might help a nswer.

The conference reception allowed the introductions made during the symposium to develop into more relaxe d conversations. While formal presentations centered on research, sharing a meal gave us time to talk about our daily lives and cultures. These early conversations helped us feel more comfortable during the later activi ties in Toyama. I came to appreciate how attending an international meeting can help establish relationships with colleagues with whom I may continue exchanging ideas in the future.

The presentation opportunity provide d through the ASUNARO Award also motivated me to continue developing my academic skills. Alongside conduct ing research, I hope to improve my ab ility to explain it clearly to audiences u nfamiliar with my work. I was grateful to have this opportunity during my re sidency.



May 22 and 23 Exchange in Tokyo and Toyama





On May 22, we traveled from Okinawa to Tokyo, where Dr. Tanaka kindly hosted a meal f or the visiting group. Continui ng to spend time together aft er the conference helped me appreciate the connection bet ween the academic meeting a nd the subsequent clinic visit. I was grateful for the thoughtf ul arrangements that allowed us to continue the trip comfor tably in an unfamiliar setting.





On May 23, we took the Shinkansen to Toyama. Exploring the city, including the Toyama Glass Art Museum, g ave us time together in a setting quite different from the conference venue. Traveling with colleagues in the s ame specialty allowed us to learn about interests and perspectives that would not necessarily emerge during formal introductions. I felt that these shared experiences also helped create a comfortable basis for later con versations about clinical practice.

One of the highlights of our first day in Toyama was the welcome dinner at Kentarou, which Mrs. Sano gener ously hosted for us. The food was exceptionally delicious, and I thoroughly enjoyed the meal. It was a lovely way to begin our stay in Toyama and gave us an opportunity to spend time with Mrs. Sano and the ASUNARO Pediatric Dental Clinic team before our clinic visit. Around the table, we shared stories about our cultures an d everyday lives, and the conversation helped us get to know one another in a relaxed setting. I especially ap preciated how warmly Mrs. Sano welcomed us. As a visitor from another country, being received with such ki ndness made me feel comfortable and included. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to her for this w onderful evening, which I will remember as much for the warmth of her hospitality as for the excellent food.

Conversations about our cultures and daily lives gave us a chance to get to know the people behind the clinic before our visit. Learning about the people who work in an institution, and the atmosphere they create, was an important part of the exchange alongside seeing its facilities and programs.



As a resident, it is easy to become accustomed to the clinical routines and training structure of my own hospital. Meeting pediatric dentists from other countries prompted me to reconsider the circumstances that shape familiar approaches. The same clinical concern may be addressed differently depending on the setting and the needs of the patients. Understanding those differences offers an opportunity for mutual learning.

One aspect of the trip that I particularly appreciated was getting to know the participants beyond their roles as speakers or hosts. As we traveled and shared meals, they began to feel like colleagues with whom I could discuss questions in the future. I felt that these comfortable personal connections, together with shared academic interests, could help sustain international exchange.



May 24 Traditional Culture and Crafts in Toyama



On May 24, we explored the culture and traditional crafts of the Toy ama region with Professor Nakano and the ASUNARO team. At Aino kura Gassho-zukuri Village, we saw architecture and surroundings th at reflected local ways of life. Having time to learn about the region between the conference and the clinic visit helped me better apprec iate the setting in which our hosts live and work.

During the traditional washi papermaking activity, we handled the materials and followed the steps involved in making paper. Creating an object left a different impression from simply looking at a finishe d product. Ideas that had seemed clear when explained became mo re concrete when I worked through the process myself.

This experience also made me reflect on how we teach children in p ediatric dentistry. Explaining toothbrushing does not necessarily tra nslate into the required movements or a lasting habit. Giving childre n an opportunity to try, recognize what they find difficult, and try again may be valuable. Although the paper making activity was unrelated to oral health, it helped me appreciate how active participation can support un derstanding and memory.



In the afternoon, we visited Inami and Zuisenji Temple and encountered me talworking and casting at Nousaku. I found the connection with the casting processes taught in dentistry particularly interesting. Understanding a mate rial, planning a form, and adjusting the details of production to improve the finished object had parallels with dental work. Seeing these traditional craf ts provided a different context for thinking about materials and techniques that were already familiar to me.

The cultural activities also gave the visiting group experiences to share. Con versation developed naturally as we participated in activities and ate together. We became more comfortabl e with one another and learned more about each other's cultures. Including such opportunities alongside inst itutional visits in future exchange programs could help participants feel more at ease when sharing their view s.







After a full day of exploring Toyama's traditional culture and crafts, Mrs. Sano generously treated us to dinner at Tanba. The Japanese cuisine was truly delicious, and the meal became another memorable part of the trip. Having experienced the local architecture and craftsmanship during the day, I was pleased to end the evening by enjoying Japanese food together with our hosts and fellow participants. The dinner also gave us time to sit down, reflect on the places we had visited, and continue our conversations without the pace of the day's activities. I was particularly grateful to Mrs. Sano for her thoughtful hospitality on two consecutive evenings. Her generosity made our stay in Toyama feel personal and welcoming, and I felt fortunate to be cared for so kindly while away from home. The dinner at Tanba left me with fond memories of both the wonderful food and the people with whom I shared it. I sincerely thank Mrs. Sano for making this evening such an enjoyable conclusion to our day.



May 25 Visit to ASUNARO Pediatric Dental Clinic

On May 25, we visited ASUNARO Pediatric Dental Clinic, a central part of the program. Its spaces and activities for children reflected the name ASUNARO KINGDOM. During our visit, the clinic featured a bakery theme, with several elements designed to give children an experience different from the dental settings they might ordinarily encounter.





I was particularly interested in the kingdom passports and bank books issued to children. Inviting a child to become a member of this setting seemed to give the visit a personal meaning. When waiting and receiving care become part of a story with the child's own records, the appointment may be remembered as a more distinct experience. These items also seemed to offer a way of connecting one visit with the next and supporting an ongoing relationship with the clinic.

The games and rewards were also interesting from the perspective of pediatric behavior guidance. Activities that allow children to attempt a task and feel a sense of achievement may help them form positive memories of a dental visit. A brief tour cannot establish the actual effectiveness of these programs. However, the visit encouraged me to consider how the familiar concept of positive reinforcement might be incorporated into the wider visit, beyond brief praise or a reward during treatment.

The toothbrushing song and interactive oral hygiene activities reflected an effort to communicate at a level children could understand. In pediatric dentistry, there is often a great deal to explain to caregivers, and the child can sometimes become less directly involved in the educational process. When children participate and receive feedback on their own actions, oral care may become something they feel capable of doing themselves. I wanted to think further about giving children an active role that matches their age and understanding.

ASUNARO's approach also reminded me that the time before and after treatment contributes to the overall dental experience. A child's first encounter with the space, activities while waiting, and memories after treatment may shape expectations of the next appointment. As a resident, I often focus on the accuracy of the procedure and the child's cooperation during treatment. The visit encouraged me to pay closer attention to the experiences surrounding that treatment.



It may be difficult for every institution to provide spaces or programs on the same scale. Nevertheless, explaining the visit to children and giving them opportunities to participate can be considered within different clinical settings. In my future practice, I would like to observe more carefully both what children fear and where they might gain confidence. This visit encouraged me to take a longer view of how children be

come comfortable with dental care.





Later that day, we also enjoyed a sake experience, which gave me an opportunity to appreciate another aspect of Japanese food culture. The sake was delicious, and I enjoyed taking some time to taste it during our visit. It was a memorable addition to the day's activities and offered a relaxed moment to spend with the group after our visit to ASUNARO Pediatric Dental Clinic. I was especially grateful to Professor Nakano, who kindly gave me sake as a gift. Having enjoyed the tasting, I was delighted to receive something that would remind me of our time in Toyama. His thoughtful gesture made the experience even more special, and I would like to express my sincere thanks for his generosity.



In the evening, we gathered for dinner at La loc anda del pittore. The food was excellent, and I thoroughly enjoyed the meal. As this was our fi nal evening in Toyama, I particularly appreciate d the opportunity to sit together and spend mo re time with the people who had made the visit so enjoyable. After a day that included the clin ic visit and the sake experience, sharing a delici ous dinner was a lovely way to bring the day to a close. It was difficult to say goodbye after spe nding several days together, but I left with fond memories of the food, the conversations, and the kindness we had received throughout our s tay. I hope we will have the opportunity to mee t again.

May 26 Return Home and Reflections on the Visit

As I returned home on May 26, I reflected on the week's activities. Presenting in Okinawa, spending time wit h colleagues in Tokyo and Toyama, experiencing traditional crafts, and visiting ASUNARO were different expe riences. Each prompted me to consider how I approach children and build relationships with colleagues as a pediatric dentistry resident.

Implications for My Clinical Practice and Education

The first aspect of my practice I would like to reconsider is how I explain things to children. Helping caregivers understand is important, but so is involving children in their own treatment and oral care. I would like to be more deliberate about explaining the next step in age-appropriate language, offering small tasks a child can manage, and acknowledging specifically what the child has accomplished.

I also want to pay more attention to the memories children take away after treatment. An appointment that the dental team considers successful may still be remembered by a child as frightening. Even when a visit has been difficult, recognizing the child's effort and explaining what to expect next time may help shape how it is understood. Alongside checking the treatment outcome, I felt that we should consider how the child experie nced the appointment.

In learning from international colleagues, I felt it was important to understand why an approach developed a nd the setting in which it is used. At ASUNARO, considering how the programs invite children to participate a nd give meaning to their visits was more useful than focusing only on the appearance of the space. Approachi ng other institutions with these questions can also help me reflect on my own practice.

Continuing the Exchange and Acknowledgments

Spending time with colleagues from Japan and Taiwan showed me how academic exchange can continue bey ond the presentation hall. I hope we will meet again at future conferences and continue sharing clinical exper iences and research ideas. Opportunities for younger pediatric dentists to discuss cases and concerns in a co mfortable setting could help the relationships formed during this visit develop into further learning.

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Sano and the JSPD members who made the ASUNARO Award and t his exchange possible. I also sincerely thank Mrs. Sano, Professor Nakano, Dr. Tanaka, and the ASUNARO Pedi atric Dental Clinic team for their warm hospitality throughout the visit, as well as my supervisors and the Kor ean Academy of Pediatric Dentistry members who supported my participation. I hope to carry these experien ces into my clinical work and research as I continue learning how to provide dental care in which children can feel comfortable and take an active part.