

12. Taiwan's Report

Tzu-Yun Chu¹

¹ *Clinical Dietitian, Dietetics and Nutrition Department, Taipei Veterans General Hospital, Taiwan*

Asian dietitians commonly face issues such as their profession being undervalued, inadequate exposure and publication of academic papers, lack of respect from other professionals, and low salaries. To address these challenges, the Asian Young Dietitian Network (AYDN) was formed at ACD 2022, providing a very valuable communication pathway and experience for young dietitians in Asia. I am very happy to have the opportunity to participate again in the kick-off meeting

held by AYDN in Tokyo. This kick-off meeting was mainly divided into three parts. The first part involved understanding the work and environment of clinical dietitians in Japan by visiting Nerima Hikarigaoka Hospital. The second part focused on understanding the work of dietitians in Japanese school lunch programs through a visit to Funabori Elementary School. Finally, the meeting concluded with discussions on the future plans and goals of AYDN.



Fig 1. ACD, 2022



Fig 2. AYDN, 2023

Visit to Japanese Hospital (Nerima Hikarigaoka Hospital)

Nerima Hikarigaoka Hospital is a comprehensive hospital with 457 beds, which is different from the large hospitals commonly seen in Taiwan. In Japan, the medical hierarchy and levels of specialization are more finely divided than in Taiwan, allowing each hospital to focus more on development in their specific fields.

Here are a few points that left a deep impression on me during the visit to Nerima Hikarigaoka Hospital:

Labor Shortage Solution: Taiwan has been facing a severe labor shortage in recent years, especially in the catering industry. Hospital kitchens, which need to work with shift schedules, are particularly impacted. Nerima Hikarigaoka Hospital uses a system called "Meal Shuttle" which allows for the preparation of the next day's breakfast in the afternoon of the previous day. This reduces the number of chefs required to come in at 4 a.m. to cook breakfast, thus lowering staffing needs and costs.



Fig 3. Meal Shuttle at the hospital

*To whom correspondence should be addressed:
jerrychu388@gmail.com

Automated Rice Cooking System: The hospital has a fully automated rice cooking system that can complete the process from washing rice to cooking with the press of a button. This also helps to mitigate the burden of staff shortages.

Comprehensive Electronic Medical Record System: This system facilitates clinical dietitians in writing nutrition care records, reducing the workload in clinical settings.

Lower Dietitian-Patient Ratio: The ratio of clinical dietitians to patients in Japan (1:40-50) is much lower compared to Taiwan (1:200-300). This allows clinical dietitians to provide more comprehensive care to patients.

The aforementioned points are areas where Taiwan can learn and emulate in the future. However, aspects that involve changes in national laws and policies will require collective efforts and advocacy from the entire dietitian community in Taiwan.

Visit to elementary school for school lunch (Funabori Elementary school)

Japan's school lunch program is considered a model for the world. Beyond providing nutritionally balanced meals, the most prominent and globally relevant aspect of their approach is "Food and Agriculture Education." This comprehensive approach not only focuses on the nutritional value of the meals but also educates students about food sources,

agriculture, and the importance of a balanced diet. This holistic perspective helps to instill healthy eating habits and a deeper understanding of food and nutrition from a young age, which is an aspect that many countries could benefit from adopting. What struck me the most is that the effective implementation of Food and Agriculture Education has achieved the goal of zero waste.

Taiwan's school nutrition lunch policy faces several challenges:

Limited Variety of Dishes: The government mandates that meals be served in a format of four dishes and one soup, which hampers the diversity of meals.

Low Meal Costs: The fees collected from students' parents range between 1 to 2 US dollars. This amount covers all costs including ingredients, manpower, facility equipment, and utilities like water and gas. In Japan, although a similar fee of around 2 US dollars is charged, it is only used to cover the cost of ingredients, with the government subsidizing the other expenses.

Incomplete Implementation of Food and Agriculture Education: Taiwan has not yet fully implemented and practiced Food and Agriculture Education. However, there is good news: in 2023, related legislation was passed, raising hopes that Taiwan can advance towards adopting a Food and Agriculture Education system similar to Japan's in the future.



Fig 4. Zero Waste at school lunch

Kick-off meeting of AYDN

During the kick-off meeting, I shared with other countries the various nutritional challenges Taiwan is currently facing, with obesity being the most pressing issue. As of 2023, over 50% of adults in Taiwan are overweight or obese. This issue of obesity is also a common problem across many Asian countries. Therefore, AYDN can play a crucial role in the future by facilitating ongoing exchanges and collaborations. Through these efforts, member countries can jointly research and find solutions to effectively address the obesity epidemic in Asia. This collective approach can leverage shared experiences and strategies, potentially leading to more effective and culturally sensitive

solutions to combat obesity in the region.

What impressed me during the discussions was the severe issue of female anemia faced by many countries, such as India, Indonesia, and Bangladesh, which is more pronounced compared to Taiwan. Through these exchanges, Taiwan could potentially offer strategies to collectively address this problem. Moreover, concerning the issue of obesity, Thailand's experience with implementing a sugar tax (being the first country in Asia to do so) could serve as a valuable reference for Taiwan in formulating future policies to tackle obesity. Learning from Thailand's outcomes and the effectiveness of the sugar tax could provide insights into potential approaches for reducing sugar

consumption and addressing obesity-related health issues in Taiwan.

After the kick-off meeting, I shared my experiences and learnings with my colleagues and supervisors at the hospital, as well as with other dietitians through my social media networks. There was considerable interest in the future development of AYDN, and the initiative received high praise for its

progress. Many young dietitians in Taiwan are also keen to become part of AYDN, showing a growing enthusiasm for international collaboration and exchange in the field of nutrition. This interest highlights the recognition of the importance of global networking and knowledge sharing in addressing nutrition-related challenges.



Fig 5. Kick-off Meeting