

Bangladesh Report of the Young Asian Dietitian Network's Meeting in Aomori, Japan

Sumaya Islam

¹ *Hi-Tech Multi-care Hospital, Dhaka, Bangladesh*

² *Health and Hope Hospital, Dhaka, Bangladesh*

Introduction

Every time I meet the founder of AYDN, Prof. Dr. Shigeru Yamamoto Sensei, and my fellow dietitians, I can't help but think of the story *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* by Tetsuko Kuroyanagi. The supportive learning environment portrayed in the story reflects the same sense of openness and encouragement I experience within the AYDN community, setting a warm tone for our collaborative work. With that spirit in mind, our visit to Aomori centered on strengthening our ongoing collaborative research on the BSc Curriculum of Nutrition and Dietetics across AYDN countries. We were invited to the Aomori University of Health and Welfare, where we also toured the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics. Beyond the university, we visited a Japanese school lunch center, a primary school, a hospital, and a nursing home. These site visits broadened our understanding of how dietitians contribute across various settings and enriched our perspective on the diverse roles and responsibilities within the profession.



Photo 1: AYDN members with its Founder Prof. Dr. Shigeru Yamamoto in the campus of Aomori University of Health and Welfare.

Visit to the Aomori Elementary School Lunch Center & Sannai Nishi Elementary School

Heartfelt thanks to Aomori Elementary School Lunch Center and Sannai Nishi Elementary school for the warm welcome and hospitality. I was deeply spellbound by the discipline and safety measures concerning food, plus the deep commitment of everyone. From the well-designed facilities to the smooth workflow in the kitchen, every step reflected impressive organization and attention to detail. The rigid compliance with hygiene practices and HACCP

standards showed just how seriously the team prioritizes the safety and well-being of every child. We also saw how well-thought-out the allergy-friendly system is: labeling meals accordingly and taking proper precautions against cross-contamination. It was heartwarming to see how the dietitians play such an important role in nourishing the children and fostering healthy eating habits. The touching letters of appreciation from schoolchildren were especially appealing because they so beautifully reflected the bonding brought about by the school lunch program, connecting the children with the devoted team behind every delicious and nutritious meal. After the charming experience of the school lunch center, a visit to Sannai Nishi Elementary School was made. The smiling and innocent faces of the children who greeted us with such open hearts really made this day unforgettable. Their joyful expressions and confident body language reflected how deeply they value their school and how much they enjoy their school days.

To observe Teachers having meals together with the students and Dietitians explaining ingredients, local origin, nutritional value were experiences of real value. A Dietitian myself, it was really inspiring to see how in Japan, Dietitians play such an important role in nurturing good eating behavior in children—a behavior that will bring rewards all their life and eventually contribute to a healthy nation. In Bangladesh, too, this should be a beginning, and I am very interested in working on it.

It was also great to see students taking responsibility for the distribution of their meals, sharing in the joy of eating together, and showing appreciation so sincerely. Their teamwork, discipline, and kindness showed how the school lunch program goes far beyond providing food—it teaches values.

May the Aomori Elementary School Lunch Center continue to shine, along with Sannai Nishi Elementary School, as a place of learning, care, and inspiration for every child.

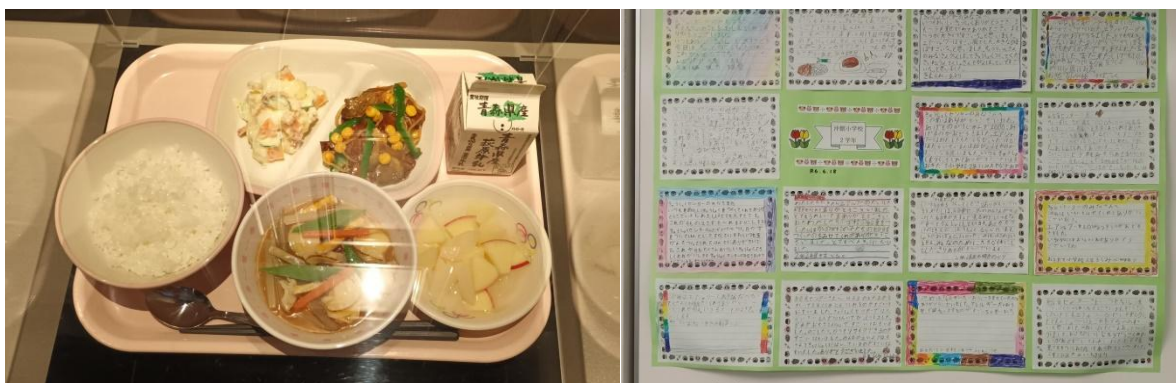


Photo 2: A sample of a balanced, fresh and thoughtfully prepared school lunch and handwritten appreciation letters from students.

Visit to the Wakoen nursing home

Our visit to the beautiful Wakoen Nursing Home, embraced by peaceful greenery and hills, was truly an invaluable experience. Thank you so much for your warm hospitality and the kindness you extended to us.

What touched us the most was the deep empathy and understanding you possess about the real needs of the elderly and your commitment to honoring their quality of life. The motto of your nursing home—not only providing care, but creating a place that actually feels like home; not only offering nutrition, but making sure residents can go on enjoying their mealtimes until the end of life—is something really noble. This should be the aspiration of every nursing home.

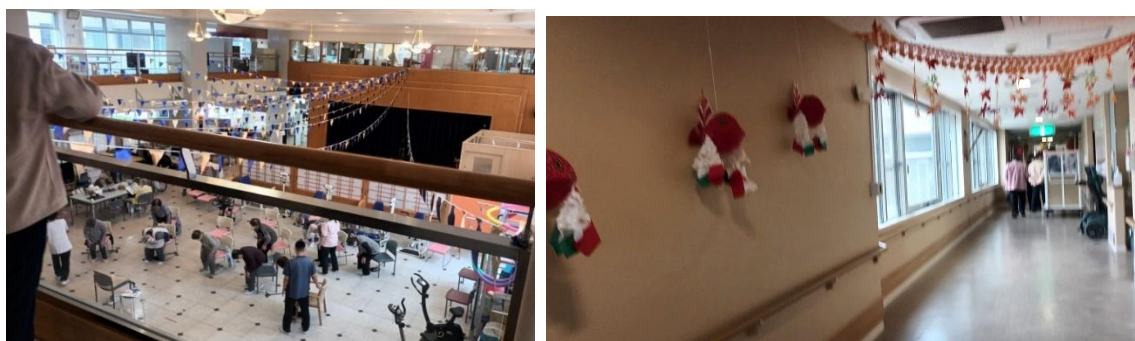


Photo 3: Group Physical activity at the nursing home – an example of how movement, engagement and social interaction are integrated into daily care.

I am deeply moved by the spirit of teamwork that radiates from each and every member of your staff. The care and concern blend so well to make the residents live a life of comfort, joy, and dignity, as if they were beloved members of a loving family. It was inspiring to see how dietitians thoughtfully create individualized meal plans, using texture modification, supplementation, and checking for allergy. Shared mealtimes and engaging physical activities create such a warm homely atmosphere. The lovely origami decorations add color and vibrancy, filling the space with joy — a soothing embrace for both heart and mind.

Celebrating different festivals, special meals on different occasions, shopping, and outdoor activities add rhythm, meaning, and love to the life of residents, while the tradition of celebrating aging and honoring those who reach 100 years is very special. However, let me mention one point: since many residents may not be too open to sharing their personal emotions with the staff, it would be great if family members were encouraged to visit them as often as possible; their presence may help residents open their hearts and express their feelings more. I want to sincerely wish every member of the family at Wakoen Nursing Home continued peace, happiness, and good health. May your noble work continue to bring a smile and comfort to all who call this place home.

Visit to the Hiranai Central hospital

It was indeed an enriching experience. I most definitely appreciate the commitment of the staff toward their work and the excellent care and support given to the patients.

I feel that the Nutrition Care Process is highly organized, effective, and carried out efficiently. Specifically, it was an eye-opener and a very good learning experience to observe how Dietitians plan meals for dysphagia patients, serving them according to the stage of the patient's condition. Even for severe cases, every food item is blended thoughtfully and served in a separate dish in a presentable and respectful manner. This presentation not only enhances patients' meal acceptance and enjoyment but also reflects the compassion and professionalism of the Dietitians. I hope to implement this valuable practice in my country.

Equally impressive is the integration of technology into the Nutrition Care Process. Digital tools save time and energy for the Dietitian and enable them to apply their expertise where most needed. This is really a very efficient use of technology to elevate the quality of care.

The Dietitians' office is very professional and work-friendly, being conveniently connected with the kitchen. I sincerely wish continued success, growth, and happiness in all of your meaningful endeavors to the entire team at Hiranai Central Hospital.



Photo 5: Texture Modified meals prepared for patients with dysphagia

Aomori university of Health and Welfare Campus tour

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to Aomori University of Health and Welfare, as its warm reception and kind support made our visit to Japan truly unforgettable.

I was deeply impressed and enriched by the opportunity to observe your state-of-the-art Dietetics and Nutrition Laboratory — a remarkable blend of science and art. It was so inspiring to witness all the dedication and innovation that characterizes your institution, and quite clear how fortunate your students are to be able to learn in such an exceptional environment.

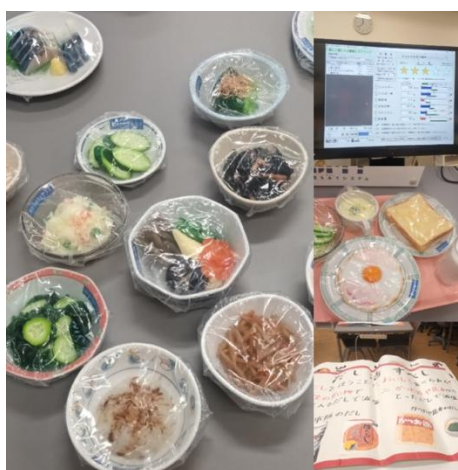


Photo 6: Innovative tools and learning environments at Aomori University of Health and Welfare.

I was amazed by a machine and software which could calculate nutritional values based on the models of food and judge dietary habits based on a star-rating system. Clearly, the clinical simulation center makes a difference in helping students grow in confidence and competence for future responsibilities by effectively bridging the gap

between classroom learning and real-life practice. I sincerely hope one day we will be able to have such facilities in universities of Bangladesh because they are truly essential in student development

AYDN manuscript

In our first manuscript, by comparing and understanding the dietetic education systems across Asia, we aimed to observe the real-world scenarios of each participating country. This has been an exploration that has really developed our critical thinking and caused new questions, along with many areas to further investigate. We are now working toward refining our data into a comparable dataset and conducting deeper, more meaningful analyses. We believe that this effort will reform, shed light on best practices, and locate gaps across countries to further the progress of dietetic education across the region.

Aomori and Japanese Culture

During our stay in Aomori, we consistently experienced warm and sincere hospitality—not only from our hosts but also from local residents, who offered polite greetings and helpful guidance.

Aomori's food culture reflects Japan's emphasis on seasonal ingredients, simplicity, and aesthetic presentation. Fresh seafood is a regional highlight, and dishes such as chawanmushi, tempura, and tuna onigiri stood out as memorable examples.

The visit to Aomori Apple Park showcased the region's strong agricultural identity and pride in its apple production, making it a noteworthy cultural experience.

We also visited the Nebuta Museum and learned about the Nebuta Festival, known for its large illuminated lantern floats.—known as “Nebuta”. These floats are believed to have originated from the ancient ritual of *Nemuri Nagashi*, a tradition meant to wash away sleepiness and help farmers stay alert during the busy agricultural season.

Conclusion

Our week in Aomori offered far more than academic insight — it deepened our understanding of dietetic practice across diverse settings and broadened our perspective on what compassionate, evidence-based care can look like. Many of our expectations were exceeded, particularly in witnessing how seamlessly Japan integrates science, culture, and human-centered values into everyday nutrition services. This experience strengthened not only our knowledge, but also our sense of professional purpose.

Looking ahead, we remain fully committed to continue our AYDN activities — through research, publication and shared learning that advances dietetic education across the region. The progress made through our comparative studies motivates us to pursue deeper analyses and long-term contributions that benefit all participating countries. Finally, we express our sincere appreciation to the AYDN organizers, Ajinomoto, Aomori University of Health and Welfare, and all the facilities that welcomed us. Their generosity, hospitality, and openness made this visit meaningful, enriching, and truly memorable.

