

(Cambodia) Report of the Young Asian Dietitian Network's Meeting in Aomori, Japan

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1: Introduction

The Asian Young Dietitian Network (AYDN) visit to Aomori provided a valuable opportunity for members once again to pursue our shared goal of strengthening the dietetics profession across Asia. This visit served as an important platform for bringing members together to continue our discussions and to observe how dietitians work in various Japanese facilities, including a school lunch center, an elementary school, a nursing home, and a hospital. In each of these facilities, dietitians play essential roles in ensuring nutrition, health, and quality of care, offering meaningful examples for countries that are still developing their dietetic systems. As a dietitian from Cambodia, this visit was an especially significant chance to learn from a country with a well-established and advanced dietetic practice. Before the visit, my hope was to see and understand what Japan has achieved and how these practices could inspire improvements in my own country. In addition, the discussions held among AYDN members during the visit were important for the ongoing projects that our network has been working on, helping us align our goals and move forward together.

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

The visit to the school lunch center and the elementary school was the part I was most excited about. My initial interest in becoming a dietitian began years ago when I watched a video about the Japanese school lunch system. Being able to see these facilities in person was a meaningful opportunity I had deeply looked forward to. At the Aomori School Lunch Center, I was impressed by how strictly the HACCP system was implemented. The facility had a clear and well-maintained structure that separated the entrance for raw ingredients from the entrance for cooked meals, ensuring proper prevention of cross-contamination. Every section followed strict hygiene protocols, temperature control, and workflow management, showing the strength of Japan's standardized system. Another point that impressed me greatly was the way the lunch center handles food waste. Instead of discarding leftovers, the facility processes food waste and converts it into fertilizer. This sustainable approach not only reduces waste but also supports environmental responsibility, making the system even more admirable. At Sannai Nishi Elementary School, I observed how lively and engaged the students were during lunchtime. Nutrition education was naturally integrated into school life, and teachers explained the menu and its nutritional value in a way that encouraged healthy habits. This highlighted how important it is for school dietitians to teach children from a young age so they can develop good eating habits early. I was also very impressed by how Japanese students prepare the meals themselves in the classroom. Each student has their own responsibility, whether serving food, arranging dishes, or cleaning up afterward. This practice teaches teamwork, respect for food, and awareness of the effort behind meal preparation.

Overall, the visit was extremely inspiring. Japan's strong national standards, high hygiene levels, and the clear role of dietitians in both the lunch center and the school offer valuable lessons. Many countries in Asia still do not have school dietitians or structured nutrition management systems. In contrast, Japan is one of the countries with the most developed and well-established school dietitian system. I believe Japan can serve as a strong role model, and many countries can learn from its structure, policies, and educational approach. As a dietitian from Cambodia, I see many elements that could be adapted in my country, such as strict hygiene management, systematic meal production, nutrition education integrated into daily routines, and the sustainable handling of food waste. This experience strengthened my motivation to continue working toward improving Cambodia's nutrition system and to contribute to raising the standards of school nutrition in the region.

3: Visit to the Wakoen nursing home

During the visit to Wakoen Nursing Home, I was able to observe how well-organized the nursing home system is in Aomori. Japan, especially Aomori Prefecture, is already in a highly aging society, and this is reflected in the quality of the facilities, safety standards, hygiene management, and daily care practices. During the tour, we were given the opportunity to taste the meals provided to residents. This allowed us to clearly understand the texture, softness, and overall design of the food served, especially for elderly individuals with chewing or swallowing difficulties. We also joined the staff on a round visit and noticed the close connection between the dietitians and the residents. Dietitians personally checked on each individual, ensuring that they were eating properly, confirming their intake, and gently encouraging them when they had leftovers. This hands-on approach showed a very high level of personalized care. Dietitians in nursing homes play a fundamental role in maintaining and improving the quality of life of elderly residents. Their responsibilities include assessing nutritional status, creating individualized meal plans, adjusting textures for dysphagia, monitoring daily food intake, and collaborating closely with nurses and caregivers. Their daily interaction with residents ensures that nutritional care is both accurate and compassionate. Many Asian countries, including Cambodia, are now approaching an aging society. As this demographic transition accelerates, nursing homes will become increasingly important in supporting the elderly population. As a Cambodian dietitian, learning from Japan's advanced elderly-care system is extremely meaningful. Japan is known for having one of the longest life expectancies in the world, and I believe that the strong foundation of elderly care including nutrition support is one of the contributing factors. This was my first time visiting a Japanese nursing home, and I was deeply moved by the environment and the level of care residents receive. I felt that residents are spending the final stage of their lives with dignity, comfort, and proper support. What impressed me the most was the philosophy at Wakoen: "to let residents enjoy meals until their very last moment." Combined with the attentive monitoring of dietitians and their sincere connection with residents, this approach truly reflects Japan's commitment to elderly well-being. I hope that in the future, Cambodia can also develop a similar system that values nutrition care as an essential part of quality of life for the elderly.

4: Visit to the Hiranai Central hospital

Due to hospital restrictions, we were not able to enter the hospital kitchen. However, the dietitian kindly explained their menu planning process and nutrition screening system, which was very informative. We also had

the opportunity to check on the patients together with the dietitian, which allowed us to observe how they monitor intake and interact with patients. Another impressive point was the explanation of the Japanese dysphagia diet categories, which helped us understand how Japan standardizes food textures for patient safety. Impression of dietitian's roles in Japanese hospitals From this visit, I gained the impression that dietitians in Japanese hospitals have a very structured, professional, and essential role. They are responsible for nutrition screening, therapeutic diet planning, texture modification, and patient follow-up. Their involvement in clinical decision-making and collaboration with other medical staff shows the importance of nutrition care within the hospital system. This visit allowed me to clearly see the scope of work of clinical dietitians in Japan. Even in a smaller hospital, nutrition care is highly organized and integrated into patient treatment. I learned how dietitians contribute not only through meal planning but also through continuous monitoring, communication, and clinical judgment. As a dietitian from Cambodia, understanding this system is very valuable. It helped me recognize the areas where hospital nutrition care in my own country can grow, especially in terms of screening, standardized diets, and the role of dietitians within the medical team.

5: Aomori university of Health and Welfare Campus tour

Although I am currently a graduate student at this university, there are still many facilities that I had never visited before. Through this tour, I was able to gain a much deeper understanding of the education system for dietitians in Japan. The campus facilities were very impressive, and I felt that many countries have not yet reached this level. For example, the cooking rooms, nutrition education rooms, and laboratory spaces were all well-equipped and designed to support hands-on learning. One highlight was the SAT system, where food models are used to educate people about nutrition. The system evaluates how healthy a meal is based on the selected items, which is very advanced. I think this tool is extremely useful not only for patient education but also for dietetic students to reflect on their own food choices. The laboratory facilities were also remarkable, especially the classes where students can conduct nutrient analysis themselves. This type of practical training is essential for future dietitians. During the visit, we also had the chance to eat a meal planned and prepared by second-year students. This allowed us to see how dietetic students apply their learning in real situations, from meal planning to cooking. This visit gave me a deeper appreciation for the quality of dietetic education in Japan. Students here learn in an environment with strong technical support, advanced tools, and practical training opportunities. Everything from understanding the smallest components of food, learning how nutrients are digested and absorbed, to applying nutrition education follows a standardized curriculum across the country. This creates a very strong foundation for producing highly skilled dietitians. As a dietitian from Cambodia, this experience was very inspiring. It made me reflect on how such systems or approaches could be adapted to improve dietetic education in my own country. Seeing how comprehensive and structured the Japanese system is motivates me to think about ways to strengthen Cambodia's nutrition and dietetics training in the future. I realized once again how broad the scope of dietitians truly is, and I am looking forward to applying what I have learned here to contribute to the development of dietetics in Cambodia.

6: AYDN manuscript

The purpose of the AYDN manuscript is to compare and understand the dietetic education systems across different Asian countries, including curriculum structures, legal frameworks, internship requirements, qualifications, and national standards. By collecting and analyzing this information, we can identify similarities, differences, and

gaps between countries. This comparison helps us better understand how dietitians are trained in each context and highlights areas where improvement, harmonization, or collaboration may be possible. Ultimately, the manuscript aims to contribute to strengthening dietetic education and supporting the development of a more unified and competent dietetic workforce across Asia. Our visit to Aomori provided a valuable opportunity for AYDN members to gather in person for the first time after more than two years of ongoing work on this manuscript. Being able to discuss face to face allowed us to confirm key issues and share insights more deeply than in online meetings. During these discussions, we discovered that countries have very different requirements for study hours and internship hours. More importantly, we realized that each country defines academic “credits” differently. Because of this, our previous comparison of credits was not fair or accurate. Therefore, we discussed the need to standardize how we compare these elements, so that the analysis becomes more meaningful and comparable across countries. Our work does not end here. We agreed to continue this discussion in our regular online meetings, refine our comparison methods, and plan the next stage of analysis. This may include recalculating standardized study hours, re-evaluating internship equivalencies, and possibly developing recommendations for a more harmonized framework in the future

7: Aomori and Japanese Culture

During our stay in Aomori, we were able to experience several aspects of the local culture, which left a very positive impression on me. First, the hospitality of the people in Aomori was warm and welcoming. Everyone we met showed kindness and made us feel comfortable throughout our visit. The food culture in Aomori was also memorable. Coming from a country without apple orchards, tasting freshly harvested Aomori apples was a special experience for me. The apples were incredibly sweet and crisp, and I finally understood why Aomori is famous for them. We also enjoyed fresh seafood, especially the fish, which tasted very clean and flavorful compared to what I am used to. We had the opportunity to visit the Nebuta Museum, where we learned about the Nebuta Festival, one of the biggest and most iconic festivals in Japan. Seeing the massive illuminated floats up close was very impressive, and it helped me appreciate the dedication, craftsmanship, and cultural history behind this famous celebration. Overall, these cultural experiences helped me understand Aomori beyond academics and gave me a deeper appreciation for the traditions, food, and people of the region.

8: Conclusion

Through this visit, my expectations were not only met but exceeded. I initially hoped to learn more about Japan’s dietetic education and clinical nutrition practices, but I gained much more than technical knowledge. Visiting various facilities, meeting dietitians, observing real practices, and experiencing the local culture allowed me to broaden my perspective as a dietitian and as a member of the AYDN community. I learned how standardized systems, teamwork, and attention to detail contribute to the high quality of Japan’s dietetic profession. This experience strengthened my motivation to continue developing myself and to apply what I learned to improve nutrition systems in my own country.

This visit also deepened my commitment to AYDN’s ongoing collaboration. Working face to face after two years of remote progress helped us strengthen our teamwork and clarify the next steps for the manuscript. I am committed to contributing actively to the continued analysis, refining our comparison methods, and supporting future AYDN projects. Beyond the manuscript, I hope to participate in joint research, exchange activities, and

future academic initiatives that strengthen dietetics across Asia. I believe AYDN has great potential to create long-term positive impact, and I am dedicated to being part of that process.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the AYDN organizers for creating this valuable opportunity, and to the Ajinomoto Foundation for supporting our activities and making this visit possible. I am also grateful to Aomori University of Health and Welfare for welcoming us and allowing us to learn from their facilities and faculty. Finally, I would like to thank all the institutions we visited including the nursing home, hospital, and school lunch center for their hospitality and willingness to share their knowledge. This experience has greatly enriched my understanding and will continue to influence my growth as a dietitian



Picture 1: Aomori elementary school Lunch



Picture 2: SAT system food model with IC chip



Picture 3: Hospital dysphagia food



Picture 4: Nutrition education