

Remarks by Mr. Nobuyuki Watanabe, Ambassador of Japan to Papua New Guinea on occasion of the graduation ceremony for the students of  
School of Medicine and Health Sciences,  
The University of Papua New Guinea

Date: 28 April 2022  
Venue: John Guise Stadium

- Acting Registrar - Mr Roboam KAKAP,
- Chancellor & Chairman of University Council - Mr. Robert Igara,
- Pro Chancellor - Mr Goiye GILENG,
- Vice Chancellor - Prof. Frank GRIFFIN,
- Executive Dean of School of Medicine & Health Sciences - Prof. Nakapi TEFUARANI,
- Council and Senate Member - Amb. Peter EAFEARE,
- Members of the Council,
- Executive Deans of Schools,
- Staff of the University,
- Graduands
- Distinguished guests, and ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great honour to have this opportunity to deliver my congratulatory remarks to the graduating students of School of Medicine and Health Sciences of the University of Papua New Guinea.

To come to this point of graduation, you might have overcome innumerable difficulties. I hope my stories today will give you thoughts about your bright future which is waiting for you.

From today, you will be going out to the frontline of the medical and health fields. This means that you also will be bearing bigger responsibilities than ever before in your day to day life.

In the real world, you will soon reach the limits when working as an individual. However, you will be able to make far greater achievement when working as a team. In many cases, you will be able to break through the problems that you had been unable to solve when working on your own, by consulting, co-operating together with your team members. An old

Mongolian proverb says, “Go alone if you want to go fast. Go with your friends if you want to go far”. This applies not only to individuals but also to organisations and countries as well.

Dear graduants,

Let me touch the topic of the medical and health situation in Japan.

In Japan, the average life expectancy is more or less 85 (female 87.74, male 81.64) today. This is one of the highest in the world, whereas in PNG it is 64.5. However, around 1950, Japans life expectancy was around 60 but gradually increased thereafter reaching 80 only about a decade ago. Here is some background on the medical and health situation in Japan:

i Improvement of medical standards thanks to the progress of science. Medicines, testing tools, medical equipment, treatment techniques had progressed remarkably in the past years. As you know very well, in the field of new drug development, drugs are being customised or developed so as to be effective to characteristic of sickness and individuals. As to testing tools, new technologies such as CT scan, MRI making the most use of state of the art technologies dramatically develop the diagnostic level. Medical equipment as well. Artificial Intelligence or AI based modern equipment is being practically put into use. So as treatment technologies. ICT made distant treatment and robotic operation possible. Today, the most well-known Japanese medical technique is ISP cells for which Dr Shin-ya Yamanaka was awarded a Nobel Prize. Competition of its application is so fierce that it has been widely used in the global medical arena. Those who are in the scene of modern medical treatment have privileges to enjoy new technologies. Ancient Chinese said “Onko-Chishin” which means to know about the ancient is a good way to know the future, in English “standing on the shoulders of Giants” which also means accumulation of achievement leads to new findings. You are also much encouraged for new challenges based on great achievements of predecessors.

ii Japan has established Universal Medical Insurance system which is very unique. Under this insurance system, majority of medical expenses are covered by pooled funds collected by means of periodically paid premium by all citizens. Today, patients generally bear 30% of their medical expenses due. At the same time, medical expenses and drug prices are being unified

nationwide, thus patients can enjoy the same treatment at the same price anywhere in Japan. However, easy access to medical services thus realised by this insurance system makes the elderly get together at hospitals for social purposes and not necessarily their illness. Some people say “he cannot come to hospital because he is sick”: not a joke.

iii In the global society, concept of universal health coverage is becoming common whereby necessary quality primary health service is reachable to anybody, anywhere and affordably.

More important factors that helped to improve the Japanese medical and health services are the devoted contribution of people like doctors, nurses and therapists. After had been educated and trained for some years, they, making effort and accumulating experiences contribute at the frontline of medicare.

However, because of sharp growing demand of medical services because of aging problem, supply shortage of medical labour force entail persistent and longer hour harsh working status as well as lower payrolls in the industry. In such a situation, strong will and commitment of those who are engaged in medical and health service are the biggest foundation to sustain medical services in Japan.

Dear graduants,

The efforts and history which helped to grow the Japanese medical and health field to its current situation can be a good benchmark for development of the industry in PNG. Let me now explain Japan’s contribution to PNG for the development of the medical and health field in the past years.

Around the year 1990, 11 hospitals nationwide including Port Moresby General Hospital were constructed under development aid from the Japanese government.

In the medical and health sector, Japan have dispatched no less than 100 volunteers and experts to date.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic became a pressing issue in the past 2 years, Japan ahead of other countries donated PPEs. In addition to this, Japan

provided the budget support worth 280 million USD. And in cooperate with international organization like WHO, UNICEF, FAO, UN Women, Japan have provided medical equipment and cold chain equipment worth 30 million USD. It was just some days ago when I attended a hand-over ceremony with health minister Mr Jelta Wong to donate 30 vehicles which will help deliver vaccines to rural and remote areas.

Dear graduants,

Japan has been engaged in a wide range of health related activities worldwide, aiming at the Universal Health Coverage where anyone can afford and access to high quality primary healthcare. For the fight against COVID-19, Japan has so far disbursed 1 billion USD to the COVAX Facility and has donated more than 43 million doses of vaccines to countries and regions in need. In addition, Japan has provided “Last One Mile Support” totaling approximately 160 million USD in 77 countries and regions to strengthen vaccination capacity, including the contributions to PNG that I mentioned earlier. Furthermore, Prime Minister Kishida recently pledged additional 500 million USD to COVAX Facility.

However, in order to maximize the effectiveness of such contributions, coordination among stakeholders based on the needs of each site is indispensable. Infection prevention measures, penetration of preventive medical service, exchange of medical and health technologies, drug development and its spread, areas of co-operation is growing wider. Those who are to be engaged in the medical and health field will on one hand be required to treat patients in front. But at the same time, you are also highly recommended to grow and maintain global perspectives as well. I firmly believe that such perspectives shall definitely be of great help when you become in a position to lead the medical and health field in PNG.

Dear graduants,

Not only is Japan supporting the medical and health field, but it is keen to grow relationship with PNG in promoting political dialogue, economic cooperation in wide spectrum of society, investment, and cultural exchange. Representing Japan, I am committed to further contributing to the development of the country as a true partner, and hopefully to attaining PNG’s SDGs.

As you move step by step forward from tomorrow, you may sometimes come across difficulties or feel frustrated when facing reality in the society. However this is for sure that experiences of both success and failure will definitely be a power for you to grow.

Last but not least, let me conclude my speech by introducing a Japanese proverb.

In Japan, we say, “a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step”. I truly hope that today is going to be a very first step towards a long and bright future to come for all of you.

Congratulations all and I wish you best wishes for your future.

Thank you.