

Information of the first master course for Tropical Medicine in Japan

INAUGURATION OF THE MASTER COURSE IN TROPICAL MEDICINE AT NAGASAKI UNIVERSITY: A MILESTONE IN TROPICAL MEDICAL EDUCATION IN JAPAN.

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Abstract: We now live in a world where the threat of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases crosses continental and national borders. In recognition of this trend the world realizes the importance of nurturing expertise in the control of infectious diseases based on sound knowledge, experience, and evidence. The introduction of a Master of Tropical Medicine course at the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences in Nagasaki University, Japan is expected to provide a whole new opportunity for eager doctors to acquire necessary knowledge and skills to combat the world-wide burden of infectious diseases.

Key words: Master course; tropical medicine; infectious diseases

Year 2006 shall witness a new start to tropical medical education in Japan when the Master Course of Tropical Medicine, the first of its kind in this country, begins at the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Nagasaki University. Since we shall take part in the course as course director and course coordinator, it should not be out of place for us to briefly introduce this course in the context of tropical medicine and international health at large.

Perhaps a few words may be necessary to clarify the use of the word "tropical medicine". In the 19th century medicine became global as exemplified by the inauguration of International Medical Congress in Paris in 1867. As a natural consequence of such globalization in medicine, tropical medicine emerged and developed towards the end of the 19th century. The first tropical medical school, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine in the United Kingdom, opened in April 1899 followed by Tropical School in London six months afterwards. Globalization at that time period strongly mirrored the spirit of imperialism in which great powers competed against each other in order to enlarge their colonies in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Oceania. Such imperial expansion was hampered by infectious diseases prevalent in the tropics. Thus, the primary purpose of tropical medicine then was for better medical protection of their nationals in the tropics where it was infamously dubbed as the grave of white men.

While we recognize the dark side of the image that has always accompanied the term tropical medicine, it is also true that tropical medicine represented the passion and goodwill of the doctors heading for steaming tropical countries where a full range of maladies flourish.

After a short period of optimism in the middle of the 20th century that many of the infectious diseases would be overcome before the turn of the millennium, we are now facing the threat incurred by a number of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. The speed at which these infectious diseases spread from one country to another has been accelerating due to ever-expanding economic activities and international travels. Such evolvement has brought tropical medicine back into the limelight and the world now demands experts with knowledge and enthusiasm to combat this current trend. In addition, a further reflection on the issue reveals that the role that tropical medicine is expected to play will not differ much from the one that it played a century ago. In other words, tropical medicine is again playing a vital role to assure the health of the people living in the developed countries, and for this reason developing expertise in tropical medicine has significant merits in developed countries as well as in developing countries.

The Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at Nagasaki University is the only school in Japan that runs a PhD course specializing in emerging infectious diseases and tropical medicine. Furthermore, the Institute of Tropical

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Medicine at this University has been playing a central role in medical research in the tropics, human development and provision of human resources for disease control programs overseas. We are launching a Master course in Tropical Medicine in this prestigious venue with the intent of contributing to the global efforts to reduce the burden of tropical and infectious diseases. To achieve this goal, we will provide students with opportunities to attain a broad range of skills and knowledge relating to tropical medicine by introducing a structured program maximizing the utility of teaching resources available at the Institute of Tropical Medicine. Specifically, we will place emphasis on acquisition of knowledge required for management and control of infectious diseases backed up by solid foundation of microbiology and advanced molecular biology tools.

The details of the course can be obtained by visiting our website at: <http://www.mdp.nagasaki-u.ac.jp/eng/index.html> (see Section 'Student Center'). We describe below the outline of this 12-month course due to commence in April 2006 with students recruited from countries world-wide (the course will be taught in English). We are targeting medical doctors with at least two years of clinical experience who have strong interests in infectious diseases occurring primarily in the tropics or have future plans of working in tropical countries.

The course consists of three components: a) lectures, tutorials and practicals (laboratory practices); b) overseas clinical training; and c) a research project (Master dissertation).

a) Lectures, Tutorials and Practical (from April to July 2006)

Lectures and practicals aim to cover essential knowledge of clinical infectious diseases with frequent reference to relevant information of microbiology (including virology), parasitology, and entomology. There are epidemiology and public health sessions designed for building up basic skills in study design, data management and medical statistics. The course will hold a series of tutorial sessions for discussion on clinical cases and disease outbreaks with particular emphasis on diagnosis, treatment, prevention and control.

b) Overseas Training (August 2006)

All students will attend overseas training for four weeks where they will have exposure to real clinical cases in the local hospitals by attending ward rounds and outpatient clinics and having clinical case discussions. In addition, students will visit community health facilities, ministry offices, internationally recognized research groups, and international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

c) Research Project (from September 2006 to March 2007)

All students will be assigned to conduct a research project under the supervision of professors and will submit a Master dissertation.

In closing, we are in the process of reaching the first milestone in the tropical medical education in Japan with the imminent establishment of the Master Course in Tropical Medicine at Nagasaki University. In modern tropical medicine now is the time when opportunities are greater than ever.