

IFMSA-Japan: Empowering medical students in Japan



JMAJ 56(4): 278–281, 2013

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The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations Japan (IFMSA-Japan) is one of the biggest medical student organizations in Japan. The IFMSA-Japan is the Japanese branch of The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA).

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations

The IFMSA is a non-political and non-governmental organization which is officially recognized as an NGO by the United Nations (UN) and as an international forum for medical students by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The IFMSA was founded in 1951. It is the world's oldest and largest independent organization representing associations of medical students internationally.

It also has official relationships with other UN agencies and the World Medical Association. The IFMSA currently has 108 National Member Organizations (NMOs) from more than 100 countries across six continents with over 1.2 million students represented worldwide.

The mission of the IFMSA is to offer future doctors a comprehensive introduction to global health issues. Through its programs and opportunities, we nurture culturally sensitive students of medicine who are intent on exerting an impact on the transnational inequalities that shape the health of our planet.

Through the IFMSA, students undertake various kinds of projects, conferences, and workshops.

The IFMSA's main activities are overseen by standing committees on public health and reproductive health, including AIDS, human rights, peace, and medical education, and unique

exchange programs. To develop future human resources capable of taking a key role in the improvement of healthcare systems, the IFMSA provides students with training on various topics, such as leadership, facilitation, project management, communication, and advocacy; this training is also helpful to students in managing IFMSA activities.

The IFMSA holds a General Assembly twice a year, in March and August (**Figs. 1 and 2**). About 900 medical students from 90 countries attend the General Assembly, which is the IFMSA's biggest event. Over the one week of the General Assembly, participants attend standing committee sessions and training sessions, as well as present reports on the activities of their NMOs. It is a great opportunity for students to discuss global health issues, share their thoughts, and build networks all over the world.

IFMSA-Japan (Fig. 3)

As mentioned above, the IFMSA-Japan is a branch of the IFMSA. The association currently has local committees (LCs) from 53 medical faculties in Japan. The mission of the IFMSA-Japan is to create a better society by nurturing health professionals with a broad perspective through contributions to society and international relationships. Our activities basically follow the structure of the IFMSA.

Standing Committee on Research Exchange (SCORE)/Professional Exchange (SCOPE)

SCOPE and SCORE aim to promote international understanding and co-operation among medical students and all health professionals

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Fig. 1 General Assembly in Denmark



Fig. 2 General Assembly—Presidents from all over the world



Fig. 3 National Assembly with 400 participants

through international exchange of students. The exchange program offers students unique educational and cultural experiences in addition to the regular medical curriculum. It also helps to broaden the students' understanding of medical and social conditions in different countries.

Currently over 120 students from Japan participate in the IFMSA exchange program every year.

Standing Committee on Public Health (SCOPH)

SCOPH aims to raise awareness of public health

issues, mainly with regard to disease prevention and health promotion in Japan.

SCOPH currently oversees 5 projects: the Africa Village Project, Asia Community Health Project, Teddy Bear Hospital Project (Fig. 4), Community Medicine Tour Project, and Healthy Lifestyle Project. Some projects are focused on community health in rural areas of Japan and in developing countries, while others are related to health promotion, especially amongst young generations. For example, the Teddy Bear Hospital Project is one of IFMSA-Japan's biggest projects, involving approximately 30 LCs. The



Fig. 4 Teddy Bear Hospital

aim of this project is to assuage children's fears of physicians and hospitals.

Teddy Bear Hospital activities are conducted mainly at kindergartens. Children bring their own teddy bears (patients), and medical students act as their doctors. The room is set up like a hospital and has multiple stations. Each station has a different educational topic, such as ambulance, x-ray, healthy eating, and surgery.

After coming to the "Teddy Bear Hospital," the child first explains the symptoms of their teddy bear's illness to the teddy doctor. Together with the doctor, they draw up an anamnesis and then the teddy doctor carries out a "physical examination" (palpation, auscultation, etc.) and further diagnostics ("x-ray," etc.). Most teddy bear and doll patients have arm or leg fractures, and so they receive medical treatment. The teddy doctor only provides non-invasive treatments using tapes and bandages. Finally, the teddy doctor writes a prescription and the child can get some "medicine" sweets from the "Teddy Bear Hospital Pharmacy."

The program is a unique and interactive way for children to experience the atmosphere of a hospital without being patients themselves. It also provides a good opportunity for medical students to work with children, which is the main reason why the project has become popular among medical schools.

Standing Committee on Human Rights and Peace (SCORP)

SCORP is committed to providing medical students with opportunities to learn about issues

concerning refugees, human rights, and peace.

Focusing on health issues, SCORP aims to facilitate peace through discussion, learning, and experience of issues related to refugees, human rights, and peace.

Currently under review, SCORP projects include the ACTION Project, Hiroshima-Nagasaki Peace Project, Learn about Refugees Project, and Legal and Medical Issues Project. The Hiroshima-Nagasaki Peace Project is especially unique amongst SCORP projects. The aim of this project is to encourage participants from all over the world to explore the environmental and biological effects of atomic bombs and nuclear power plant accidents in countries that have experienced and overcome these tragic effects, as well as how doctors should approach these victims in the future.

Standing Committee on Reproductive Health, Including AIDS (SCORA)

SCORA is driven by a strong desire to take an active part in the prevention of and intervention in HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) with the aim of decreasing prejudice and discrimination against sexual minorities.

SCORA-Japan has two projects, the Peer Education Project and the Rainbow Flag Project. Peer Education is an approach to health promotion focusing on the issue of sex in which medical students provide support for the promotion of health-enhancing changes among their "peers," such as junior high school, high school, and university students. Rather than health professionals educating members of the public, the idea behind peer education is that ordinary lay people are in the best position to encourage healthy behavior amongst friends and family members.

Standing Committee on Medical Education (SCOME)

SCOME is a discussion forum for students interested in the different aspects of medical education in the hope of pursuing and achieving its aims. Medical education should be the concern of every medical student as it shapes not only the quality of future doctors, but also the quality of healthcare.

SCOME's mission is to build awareness of issues that are essential to changing and improving medical education in Japan.

Closing Remarks

As mentioned above, the activities of the IFMSA-Japan aim to provide medical students with a comprehensive introduction to health issues. Through its programs and opportunities, medical

students can deepen their knowledge, develop their skills, and build networks among future doctors (throughout Japan and the world). We believe that we are playing an important role for Japanese medical students and society in aiming to build a better world.