From Cambodia to Nagano: Learning, Sharing and Building Connections through the AEPC-JSPCCS Young Investigator Exchange Program

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I would like to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the **Association for European Paediatric and Congenital Cardiology (AEPC)** and the **Japanese Society of Pediatric Cardiology and Cardiac Surgery (JSPCCS)** for selecting me for the **AEPC-JSPCCS Young Investigator Exchange Program (YIEP) 2025-2026**.

Coming from Cambodia, this fellowship was a particularly meaningful opportunity. I was honoured to represent my country in this international exchange at **Nagano Children's Hospital, Azumino, Japan**, from June to August 2026, under the supervision of **Professor Kiyohiro Takigiku**.

For me, the YIEP was much more than a clinical fellowship. It was an opportunity to learn from an outstanding congenital heart centre, to share experiences from my own practice in Cambodia, and to build professional relationships that I hope will continue well beyond the fellowship.

Learning from Complex Congenital Heart Disease

My time in Nagano provided broad and practical exposure to paediatric and congenital cardiology. **Echocardiography** was a major part of my training, with practical experience in advanced **transthoracic and transoesophageal echocardiography, epicardial echocardiography and three-dimensional echocardiography**.

What impressed me most was not simply the technology itself, but how imaging was integrated into clinical and surgical decision-making. I gained a deeper understanding of how detailed anatomical and functional assessment can guide the multidisciplinary team before, during and after congenital heart surgery.

I was also involved in the assessment and management of children with **complex congenital heart disease**, including patients with Fontan circulation, systemic and pulmonary collateral vessels and challenging haemodynamic problems.

The fellowship provided practical experience with a range of catheter-based interventions, including **coil embolisation, ductal venous (DV) stenting, Balloon Atrial Septostomy and Radiofrequency energy-assisted atrial septostomy**. These cases strengthened my understanding of the relationship between anatomy, physiology, haemodynamics and intervention in complex congenital heart disease.

I also gained experience with **mechanical circulatory support, including the Berlin Heart LVAD**, and learned how advanced support strategies can be incorporated into the management of children with severe heart failure.

Another particularly interesting aspect was the use of **three-dimensional printing and patient-specific anatomical models** for surgical planning. Experiencing how cardiac imaging can be transformed into a physical anatomical model gave me a new perspective on the connection between imaging and surgery, and on how technology can improve communication within a multidisciplinary team.

Fetal Cardiology and Paediatric Arrhythmia

Fetal cardiology was another important part of my fellowship. I actively participated in fetal echocardiography and the assessment of **fetal arrhythmias and complex congenital heart disease**.

I learned to look beyond the prenatal diagnosis itself and to consider the expected physiology after birth, the appropriate delivery planning and the communication required with families, neonatologists, paediatric cardiologists and other members of the care team.

This experience has strengthened my commitment to developing **Fetal Echocardiography and prenatal counselling in Cambodia**, with the aim of improving early recognition and preparation for newborns with congenital heart disease.

The fellowship also broadened my experience in **Paediatric Electrophysiology and Pacing**, including the management of arrhythmias such as Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome and atrial flutter, as well as pacemaker programming and postoperative rhythm management.

Learning a culture of responsibility

Beyond the clinical knowledge and technical skills, one of the most lasting lessons I will take home from Nagano is the **culture of responsibility and patient safety**.

I was deeply impressed by the way the entire team worked together. Discipline, teamwork, attention to detail, communication and ownership of each patient's care were evident every day.

Everyone knew their patients well. Information was communicated carefully, decisions were discussed within the team, and every member understood their responsibility.

One principle that particularly stayed with me was:

“High responsibility and commitment, with patient safety as our priority.”

This is a culture that I hope to bring back to my own department, not simply as an idea, but as something to practise and share with colleagues and the next generation of paediatric cardiologists in Cambodia.

Building friendships and international connections

The people I met made this fellowship even more meaningful.

I am particularly grateful to **Dr Ryusuke Numata**, who supported me from the moment I arrived in Nagano. He helped me with my arrival, accommodation and many practical aspects of life in Nagano. More importantly, he became not only a valued colleague but also a close friend. His kindness made my transition to a new country much easier.

I would also like to sincerely thank **Dr. Takei, Akazawa, Yonehara, Obinata, Shibuya, Okuda, Kurosaki and Otsuki**, together with all the echocardiography technicians, nurses and staff at Nagano Children's Hospital.

Thank you to the Pediatric Cardiac Surgery Team at Nagano Children's Hospital, **Professor Takeshi Konuma, Dr. Ai Kojima** and **Dr. Yuta Hosoya** for allowing me to learn from your surgical decision-making, expertise and experience. As a pediatric cardiologist, understanding the surgical perspective has been invaluable to my practice.

From my first day, I felt welcomed as part of the team. Their generosity in sharing their knowledge, clinical experience and daily practice made this fellowship an unforgettable professional and personal experience.

Connecting Europe, Japan and Cambodia

An especially memorable moment came during the **62nd Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society of Pediatric Cardiology and Cardiac Surgery (JSPCCS 2026)** in Tokyo.

I had the great honour of meeting **Professor Jan Janoušek, President of AEPC**, and **Professor Nico Blom, Past President of AEPC**.

I am deeply grateful for their leadership, vision and dedication to improving the care of children with congenital and acquired heart disease. Their commitment to professional development and international collaboration is inspiring, particularly in strengthening connections between Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.

Their encouragement during the meeting meant a great deal to me. They encouraged me to continue learning, make the most of my fellowship in Japan and bring what I had learned back to Cambodia.

Meeting colleagues from Europe and Japan in Tokyo also reminded me that paediatric and congenital cardiology is truly an **international community**. The value of an exchange programme goes beyond scientific knowledge. It creates opportunities for mentorship, friendship, collaboration and the exchange of ideas between centres with different experiences and healthcare environments.

Bringing Nagano home

This fellowship has given me more than new clinical skills. It has given me a clearer vision of what we can continue to develop at **Kantha Bopha Children's Hospital**.

I hope to apply what I have learned in areas including:

- Advanced paediatric and congenital echocardiography
- Transoesophageal, epicardial and three-dimensional echocardiography
- Fetal echocardiography and fetal arrhythmia
- Paediatric arrhythmia and pacing
- Assessment of complex congenital heart disease and Fontan physiology
- Multidisciplinary decision-making and patient safety and
- Teaching and sharing knowledge with colleagues and trainees.

The true impact of an exchange programme is not measured only by what one person learns abroad, but by what can be **brought home, shared with others and translated into better care for patients**.

I hope to contribute to the continued development of paediatric and congenital cardiology in Cambodia and to share these experiences with the next generation of paediatric cardiologists.

Looking ahead

The AEPC-JSPCCS Young Investigator Exchange Program has strengthened my clinical knowledge, expanded my professional perspective and connected me with colleagues and friends across countries and continents.

Coming from Cambodia, training in Japan and being supported through an international programme involving AEPC has been a powerful experience. It has shown me the importance of creating opportunities for young paediatric cardiologists from different regions to learn from one another and to bring that knowledge back to their own communities.

I hope this fellowship will be the beginning of continued collaboration between **Cambodia, Japan and the wider AEPC community**.

To **Professor Takigiku** and the entire Nagano Children's Hospital team: thank you very much for your teaching, generosity, kindness and tireless support.

To **AEPC and JSPCCS**: thank you so much for believing in the value of international exchange and for giving me this great opportunity.

I return to Cambodia with new skills, new perspectives, lasting friendships and a renewed commitment to improving care for children with congenital and acquired heart disease.



Impact: A valuable journey in Pediatric Cardiology

Through the **AEPC-JSPCCS Young Investigator Exchange Program**, I undertook Advanced clinical training at a leading pediatric cardiology center in Japan, expanding my expertise in **Fetal Echocardiography, Fetal Arrhythmia, Complex Congenital Heart Diseases, and Advanced Cardiac imaging, including 3D echocardiography and TEE**. More than a fellowship, it was a lesson in leadership, discipline, teamwork, and innovation. The real impact is bringing that knowledge home to **strengthen pediatric cardiac care and education in Cambodia, while connecting Europe, Japan, and the Asia-Pacific region**.



Learning **contemporary catheter-based approaches** to **complex congenital heart disease** with **Professor Kiyohiro Takigiku** in the catheterisation laboratory at Nagano Children's Hospital.



Learning **Pericardial Echocardiography in real time** with Professor **Kiyohiro Takigiku** and receiving the book he authored on the subject.









With AEPC leaders (**Professor Jan Janoušek, President of AEPC**, and **Professor Nico Blom, Past President of AEPC**) and **Professor Kiyohiro Takigiku** in Tokyo, grateful for the international collaboration and mentorship that opened the door to advanced pediatric cardiology training in Japan and strengthened the bridge between **Europe, Asia-Pacific, and Cambodia**.





A valuable discussion with Dr. Shibuya on **complex fetal heart disease, how advanced fetal echocardiography can improve diagnosis, anticipate the physiology after birth, and guide postnatal management.** A powerful example of how fetal cardiology connects prenatal diagnosis with better preparation for newborn care.





Strengthening expertise in **3D cardiac imaging, transesophageal echocardiography (TEE), and procedural assessment**-connecting detailed anatomy with real-time clinical decision-making in complex congenital heart disease.