

## **Introduction**

My name is Catarina and I am a pediatric cardiologist from Porto, Portugal. At the time of the exchange program I was completing the last year of my fellowship and my main interest was interventional cardiology.

## **Reason to Apply**

I applied to this programme because I wanted to strengthen my clinical and academic development in pediatric cardiology and to learn from internationally recognized centres. Japan has a long tradition of excellence, innovation, and multidisciplinary care in congenital heart disease, so the programme represented an exceptional opportunity for professional growth.

## **Application Tips**

For future applicants, I would recommend highlighting specific clinical or research interests, demonstrating a clear motivation to learn from the host centre, and explaining how the experience will be integrated into their long-term career plans. Being concise, organised, and proactive during the application also helps.

## **Practical Information About the Stay**

Nagano Children's Hospital is a public institution managed by the Nagano Prefectural Government, specializing in comprehensive pediatric and adolescent care. The Pediatric Cardiology Department is led by Dr. Kiyohiro Takigiku and he gave me all the information about the documents I needed to start the exchange and the hospital provided accommodation for a small fee in their dormitories.

## **Daily Experience & Highlights**

During my stay, I followed a weekly schedule of about 40 hours. Two days per week were spent in the cardiac catheterization laboratory, where I observed an average of three procedures per day. The remaining days were dedicated to ward rounds (Pediatric Cardiology, NICU, and PICU) and the echocardiography laboratory, including scheduled fetal and transesophageal examinations.

Although my training was observational, I had the opportunity to work closely with advanced imaging technologies, follow complex clinical cases, and consolidate my knowledge in congenital and fetal heart disease.

A personal highlight was experiencing the Japanese work environment, characterised by precision, organisation, kindness, and a strong sense of teamwork.

## Impact

This programme had a significant impact on my professional and personal development. Clinically, it broadened my understanding of congenital cardiology and exposed me to new technologies and organisational models that I hope to integrate into my future practice. Personally, living and working in Japan was transformative: it strengthened my adaptability, cultural awareness, and appreciation for different healthcare systems.

