

Exchange of experiences between Poland and Japan in the medical field

By Carla Hahs

Introduction

International exchange in the medical field plays a vital role in fostering innovation, facilitating the sharing of knowledge and clinical experience and improving the quality of patient care. The purpose of this article is to examine past and current medical exchange opportunities between Poland and Japan, evaluate existing forms of collaboration, and identify areas in which academic and institutional cooperation could be further strengthened.

Medical student exchange opportunities

The academic bridge between Polish and Japanese medical education has grown significantly over the last few years, moving beyond diplomatic gestures into active, clinical cooperation. While the number of bilateral agreements is notable compared for example to agreements between Poland and USA or Poland and the United Kingdom, a closer look at these programs reveals a high accessibility but limited duration and an absence of linguistic preparation within the medical curricula. Available data suggests that nearly every major medical center in Poland has established some form of rapport with a Japanese counterpart. For instance, the Gdańsk Medical University (GUMed) has maintained its NUPACE program with Nagoya University since 1996. Similarly, the Medical University of Poznań (UMP) has collaborated with Aichi Medical University. More recently, the Jagiellonian University (UJ CM) signed a letter of intent with Kanazawa University to begin student exchanges in 2025 allowing students to participate in 6-week clinical blocks abroad. Warsaw Medical University and The Medical University of Lublin also have experience in facilitating such exchanges with respectively TOHO University School of Medicine and the Health Science University of Hokkaido. The Wrocław Medical University sends students to the International University of Health and Welfare and is visited by groups of students from that university.

However, a critical analysis of these programs supports the argument that they are short-term. Most clinical internships and “scientific exchanges” are designed to last only a few weeks or months. While the GUMed NUPACE program allows for stays of up to 12 months, it is described by the university as a “short stay” program. This trend suggests that while medical schools are eager to provide brief clinical exposures, there is a lack of long-term programs which are more common in European Erasmus+ exchanges. The author feels like one of the reasons for this,

except the high cost of long-term student exchange, is the lack of linguistic preparation, in comparison to the Erasmus+ programmes where students are either expected to know the language of the country to which they are going beforehand or have preparatory courses before starting a year abroad.

For students in the medical field another common source of exchange outside of agreements facilitated by universities is IFMSA - The International Federation of Medical Students Associations - one of the world's oldest and largest student-run organizations. It represents more than 1.5 million medical students from 123 countries. The group provides Research Exchanges such as: basic laboratory research projects, clinical research projects with lab work, clinical research projects without lab work and Global Action Projects and Professional Exchanges which are educational programs offering clerkships to medical students abroad. For the 2026/2027 exchange season there were no Professional Exchange agreements between Poland and Japan available, and only 2 places for Research Exchanges. In the recruitment process the Polish students who secured a Research Exchange opportunity, were the ones with the highest numbers of points awarded for their contribution to the Society, this suggests that very many of the members of IFMSA Poland applied for a Research Exchange in Japan. It is also worth mentioning that the exchange opportunities are not distributed equally across all medical disciplines. Most of these programs are tailored specifically for future doctors, particularly those in their 4th or 5th year of study, not necessarily students of other occupations related to the medical field such as nursing, physiotherapy, or pharmacy.

Exchange in the medical field beyond students

Polish medical institutions have been visited by Japanese experts of various medical fields.

Interventional Radiology

Dr. Shinichi Hori, a pioneer in TACE (chemoembolization) for cancer treatment and creator of the HepaSphere embolic material, was hosted in November 2025 by the Polish Society of Holistic Medicine to discuss collaborative treatment for oncological patients. This visit also initiated talks for the "Japan-in-Place" project in Osaka, designed to provide specialized internships for Polish physicians.

Neurosurgery

In 2016 prof. Isao Morita together with prof. Wojciech Maksymowicz conducted an operation of stimulator insertion for patients in comas in a hospital in Olsztyn, Poland.

The neurosurgery department of the Dolnośląski Szpital Specjalistyczny im. T.Marciniaka (a hospital in Wrocław, Poland) seems to be a center of polish - japanese exchange. The department is equipped with rare, especially in Poland, surgical instruments such as Muramasa scissors designed by the Sapporo prof, Hiroyasu Kamiyama and microscopes produced in Japan. In 2021 one of the neurosurgeons, dr Dariusz Szarek, from the Wrocław hospital participated in a webinar on Basic Microsurgical Approach and Vascular Reconstruction with prof. Rokuya Tanikawa. The hospital also hosted Prof. Rokuya Tanikawa from Sapporo, a world-renowned specialist in "minimal intervention" brain surgery, conducted a three-day workshop during which Polish and international neurosurgeons observed high-precision procedures, including surgery on a brain aneurysm performed under a microscope.

Oncology and Gastric Surgery

Prof. Wojciech Kielan of Wrocław Medical University has been a part of many conferences, symposiums and lectures in Japan on the subject of gastric cancer which allowed him to improve the diagnosis and care of Polish patients suffering from this disease. He has been awarded the title of an Honorary Member of the Japanese Endoscopic Surgery Society. The cooperation between the professor and his Japanese colleagues resulted in signing an agreement between the Wrocław Medical University and the International University of Health and Welfare, which is still in effect and developing.

Conferences

Japanese representatives have also been present, although not many, at Polish international medical conferences for example, the more recent, International CTEPH Conference 2026 in Warsaw features Japanese experts like Hiroto Shimokawahara and Hiromi Matsubara discussing advanced pulmonary hypertension treatments.

Other forms of exchange

Osaka Expo 2025

Both GUMed and UMW participated in the World Expo in Japan showcasing Polish medical innovation. GUMed presented advancements in liquid biopsy and personalized medicine, while UMW showcased its Medical Discovery Center and conducted workshops on surgical suturing and pediatric crisis management using advanced medical simulators.

Japanese Culture in Polish Medical Universities

Gdańsk Medical University has been hosting Nagoya Days which are an opportunity for not only dialogue between Japanese exchange students visiting Gdańsk, but also a time for lectures related to the Japanese health culture and wellbeing.

Japanese Support

The medical exchange also manifests through diplomatic and philanthropic channels. In May 2025, the Ambassador of Japan to Poland participated in a ceremony in Wrocław to donate medical equipment, including electroencephalograms (EEG), to a psychological-pedagogical clinic. Purchased through the “Grant Assistance for Grassroots Project” this equipment is intended to aid in the diagnosis of neurological and anxiety disorders in children, supporting their long-term education and integration.

Poland's role in the Japanese medical field

It appears that Japan has a stronger presence within Polish medical institutions than Poland has within Japanese medical universities and hospitals. Polish universities often publish detailed information about their efforts to establish international exchange programs, including partnerships with Japanese institutions. In contrast, many Japanese universities either do not list Polish institutions among their international partners or provide little publicly available information about such collaborations. This disparity may indicate that Poland has yet to establish a stronger reputation within Japan's medical academic community, although it could also simply reflect differences in how universities publicize international partnerships and exchange programs. It is also worth noting that, while the number of Japanese medical students studying in Poland remains relatively small, those who have shared their experiences online state that Polish institutions

provided them with many opportunities to gain practical skills and improve their English proficiency while receiving a high-quality education. Given these observations, the author believes that Polish medical institutions—many of which offer medical programs taught in English—should strengthen their promotion and outreach efforts in Japan to increase awareness of the educational opportunities available in Poland.

Conclusion

Medical exchange opportunities are available to both Polish and Japanese students and healthcare professionals. However, growing interest in international collaboration suggests that existing exchange programs may not fully meet current demand. Based on the available evidence, these collaborations appear to feature a greater transfer of knowledge from Japanese experts to their Polish counterparts than vice versa. This may reflect Japan's longer established international reputation in certain areas of medicine, differences in the visibility of collaborative initiatives, or the current focus of existing partnerships, rather than an imbalance in expertise. Nevertheless, it also highlights opportunities for Polish medical institutions to further strengthen their international presence and promote their own achievements within the Japanese medical community.

About the author:

Carla Hahs is a medical student at the Wrocław Medical University, and is a volunteer at the Poland - Japan Foundation