

Telecommunications, Environment/Energy and Health

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## Deirdre Lawrence

**M**y experience in the Mansfield Fellowship has forever changed me. I was fortunate to develop Japanese language proficiency, learn about Japanese culture and politics, experience the homestay hospitality of the Nishida family, and gain firsthand knowledge of the tremendous amount of health promotion work being done by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), the Shizuoka Prefecture and the National Cancer Center (NCC).

### **MHLW**

As a public health researcher at the National Cancer Institute (NCI), National Institutes of Health (NIH), my primary placement was at the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), where I learned about Japan's national health promotion plans to reduce lifestyle-related diseases. Despite my limited Japanese language reading ability, my office was very welcoming and we found ways for me to contribute to the office. My duties included synthesizing data for policymakers, providing consultation and information to respond to public health-related statements and inquiries from other ministries, politicians, the media, and private industry. While sharing an open office with twenty-seven colleagues was a culture shock, it was a clear advantage to keeping current on what was happening. Spontaneous brainstorming/problem-solving was common and "eavesdropping" was often encouraged and/or expected. English was rarely spoken in this office, so my comprehension skills dramatically improved.

### **Shizuoka Prefecture**

I gained valuable prefectural-level experience at the Shizuoka Department of Health & Welfare, where I visited hospitals, medical examination centers, and local government offices to exchange information about regional health plans, tobacco control policies, cancer screening services and the collection of health information. Each prefecture knew their population and designed ways to tailor the national plan so it could be best implemented for their prefecture. At the same time, the resources at the prefecture level seemed to be significantly less than in the national office. I now have a much better appreciation of the ability of states in the U.S. to implement effective programs for their constituents due to varying levels of resources.

## National Cancer Center

During my time at NCC, I shadowed Dr. Tomotoka Sobue, the Chief of NCC's Cancer Information Services and Surveillance Division, to multiple meetings in Tokyo and out-of-town to exchange information about cancer control in Japan and the U.S., estimating cancer incidence and mortality, cancer prevention and screening strategies, cancer registries and future cancer control goals.

## Highlights

Being a Mansfield Fellow certainly had its privileges. Having tea with the Prime Minister's wife, meeting the Crown Prince and Crown Princess (a fellow Harvard alum), and having access to other dignitaries was an ongoing thrill.

One of my best professional highlights was being included as part of the Japanese delegation to the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Conference of the Parties (COP2), in Bangkok, Thailand in July 2007. During my time at MHLW, I helped prepare the documents Japan was required to submit and was invited to travel with delegates from MHLW and the Ministry of Finance. I was given diplomatic treatment by the Japanese ambassador to Thailand even though, as a black woman, I was clearly not Japanese. This trip showed me several cultural differences. I also learned that many of the negotiations at this WHO event occurred during side conversations and hallway meetings so that decisions made during the wider sessions seemed to be just a formality.

My homestay experience with the Nishida family in Kanazawa City was one of my best personal highlights. My host-father was a haiku poet and was in charge of the famous family garden while my host mother was a tea ceremony *sensei*. I experienced many delicious foods, learned to appreciate the *onsen* and traveled to the Noto-hanto region. The Nishida family treated me like part of the family.

## Learning About Japan and Sharing My Experience

Personally, I so appreciated the generosity and hospitality of my hosts. It was common for my Japanese colleagues to invite me to their homes for dinner, including a *nabe* dinner, and for excursions on the weekend. In each placement, my agency counterparts were very pleased that I had visited their respective hometowns—such as Kagoshima, Shizuoka, Kanazawa, Iida, Kyoto, Nagasaki, Hiroshima—and generously gave me opportunities to gain more cultural knowledge and lots of practice with the Japanese language. Thanks to my hosts, I was given the opportunity to give lectures in Japanese and English about tobacco control, cancer prevention and control and health promotion programs in many forums, including Tokyo University,

the Japanese Society for Tobacco Control, and the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS).

### **Continuing My Japanese Connections**

After my return to the U.S., I hosted several guests from Japan to facilitate an exchange of the latest cancer prevention and control strategies in the US and Japan with my NCI colleagues and other cancer control experts. I also gave presentations to several audiences, including the Toshiba Discussion Series (in Seattle, Washington) and the Johns Hopkins Institute for Tobacco Control FAMRI Lecture (in Baltimore, Maryland), to share professional and personal stories about my experience in Japan, a country that I love and consider a second home.

### **My Mansfield Experience Enhanced My Work at NCI/NIH**

One of the differences I observed was that MHLW handles the many issues associated with tobacco control, such as advocacy groups, inquiries from the media, tobacco farmers, and small business owners of tobacco vending machines, by itself. In the U.S., these issues are handled by multiple U.S. federal, state and local government agencies, in collaboration with university researchers and advocacy groups. I gained a much better understanding of how these multiple components are linked in the U.S., as well as other countries. When I returned to the U.S., I continued to keep this global approach to problem-solving in mind and represented the NCI in international settings by attending workshops, giving presentations in various countries and serving as the Division's International Liaison to welcome diplomats from other countries.

After I returned from the Mansfield Fellowship experience, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) asked me to do a detail at FDA to help set up the Center for Tobacco Products and the Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee. Because MHLW had interactions with the Ministry of Finance, tobacco companies, and politicians, my experience in Japan prepared me well for the regulatory challenges of implementing the new Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act giving the FDA power to regulate U.S. tobacco companies. While on detail at FDA, I was recruited to work for Pinney Associates, Inc., which helps pharmaceutical companies market medicines worldwide. We work with clients that are Japanese owned-pharmaceutical companies, have partners in Japan or are interested in marketing their pharmaceutical products in Japan.

I will be forever grateful for my Mansfield Fellowship experience. The Mansfield Fellowship Program helped me to grow professionally and personally, providing a very

different perspective of my daily activities. Professionally, I learned the significance of communication and coordination of goals and efforts between various government entities at all levels, with the inclusion of researchers and advocacy groups. Personally, the Mansfield Fellowship experience gave me confidence in knowing that if I could live in another country and become sufficiently conversant in another language, I could handle any challenge that might come my way with active dialogue, and humbling myself to ask for help when needed. I continue to explore ways that will enable me to enhance collaborative relationships between Japan and the U.S. and hope to return to Japan in the near future.

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**Deirdre Lawrence** participated in the Mike Mansfield Fellowship Program as a representative of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services from 2005–2007. During her Fellowship year in Japan, she served in full-time placements in Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, National Cancer Center, and Shizuoka Prefectural Government. She currently is a scientist at Pinney Associates, Inc.