My time at the 43rd Pacific Association of Paediatric Surgeons (PAPS) 2010 conference in Kobe, Japan.

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Kobe, Japan, May 2010: 10,000km away from home, a very nervous medical student stands in front of a crowd of paediatric surgeons and professors. He has 8 minutes to teach them about the Sonic Hedgehog gene and its role in the repair of intestinal tissue damaged during surgery.

That was my role as one of, if not the youngest official presenter at the 43rd Pacific Association of Paediatric Surgeons conference. I presented my Bachelor of Medical Science research, and this was the culmination of further work with Professor Wei Cheng at Monash Medical Centre, where I did Paediatrics Surgery in my final year at Monash.

The experiences I gain at this conference were mind blowing. Many people never experience or see the vast difference that surgery can make to the life of a sick child. The oral and poster presentations highlighted how a child’s life could be improved or indeed saved using the revolutionary techniques and technologies that were discussed at this conference.

A world of knowledge was presented, everything from the genetics of cancer and gene therapy, to islet cell transplants for diabetic children and the future of microscopic robotic surgery. To say I was inspired by the work of these dedicated surgeons is a very big understatement.

The conference had a very relaxed and welcoming feeling, even to me as a medical student. The official “No Ties” policy, and subsequent cutting off of any ties worn, highlighted that all participants were to be viewed on a level field. The Crown Prince of Japan even came to visit and addressed the conference, twice!

Being immersed in the Japanese culture, and having a tour of local world heritage sites, showed me that despite our cultural differences we were all there for one important purpose, to learn from each other so that we can help the children of our respective countries.

Thank-you to the medical faculty for helping support me on my week long trip to the conference in Japan, to enable me to also present my own research. It has already helped to open many doors for me and my future practice and training. The global network of colleagues and friends I made will continue to inspire me towards a surgical career, so I might one day make a difference in the same way these surgeons have.