

**Introduction:**

My name is Ivana Cerovic, I am Pediatric Cardiology Fellow at Mother and Child Health Institute of Serbia, a university hospital and one of two leading pediatric institutions in my country, and Assistant Lecturer in Pediatrics at Faculty of Medicine, University of Belgrade. Since 2020, I have been AEPC Junior Member. In the following period I have devoted myself to clinical work, studying and thorough understanding of pediatric cardiology. I attended triennial OMInar in Pediatric Cardiology (2021), in organization of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and Medical University of Vienna, as well as many valuable meetings and workshops (including AEPC annual meetings). Passing the AEPC Exam in Paediatric and Congenital Cardiology in 2023, I was announced the AEPC Certified Professional. Since I work in tertiary center, we are in charge of all aspects of cardiac pathology. Focus of my interest are hemodynamics and congenital heart defects (CHD), including both noninvasive and invasive approach.

**Reason for Applying:**

Believing in long-term, dedicated work as a pathway to excellence, I have always been seeking for opportunities to broaden my knowledge, upgrade practical skills and gain experience. Interaction with colleagues is essential during that process. In those terms, international collaborations are precious, putting a young doctor out of their "comfort zone", still opening new perspectives, giving the chance to learn from eminent experts and raising the scale of proficiency, which all leads to progress even not so obvious immediately. Education in Japan, well-known for their pediatric cardiology school yet not so familiar to most of us from Europe, was a chance not to be missed.

**Application Tips:**

My advice for colleagues interested in Young Investigator Exchange Program (YIEP) in Japan would be first to make personal assessment of timing and goals. I believe some previous experience is useful, to have the basis in knowledge and recognize fields of interest, so you can make your stay as fruitful as possible. At the same time, it gives you arguments in application, where you should clarify your achievements – education and practice, involvement in AEPC meetings and education modules, other conferences and seminars, research or projects that you took part in. You should have an idea of clinical, scientific and future collaboration objectives and go towards them. Besides the facts, in applicant selection they value recognition of your strong devotion and willingness to make your visit to Japan worthwhile. Personally, I suppose that AEPC exam, active participation in AEPC meetings and enrollment in different other educational programs, were the factors appreciated in my application.

Do not let the assumption of strong competition block you from applying. Be aware that they are not looking for expert, but developing young cardiologist who will benefit most from it.

**Center Selection:**

Center selection is made by organizations (AEPC and JSPCCS), but they take into consideration your application. Clarifying your skills, interests and goals, they will find the most appropriate center and mentor for you. I was assigned to Kanagawa Children's Medical Center in Yokohama, with mentor Dr Hideaki Ueda. The hospital is

highly ranked in Japan for pediatric cardiology, predominantly engaged with complex CHD, interventional and surgical treatment.

Once you receive the center and mentor's contact, communication continues directly. You should agree with your mentor about the period and length of your program. I suggest the longer stay if you can organize it. You should ask for legal details and documentation; my experience is that you can expect polite and detailed responses and all the help that you need.

### **Practical Details:**

Although accommodation is said to be your task, you can probably rely on your host's help about it. I stayed in apartment in hospital's facility, two-minute walking distance, well-equipped and for symbolic price. For all other practical information regarding social rules, shops, transport and sightseeing, I had the support of whole cardiology team.

### **Daily Experience:**

My day was starting with ICU morning round, followed by echo examinations, catheterizations, fetal echo appointments, daily patient presentations and discussions in the meetings, outpatient clinic, etc. I had personal weekly schedules, in accordance with department dynamics, so I could make the most out of each day. I have used the evenings for research. I was eager to discover new ways of thinking in patient analysis, different skills in interventions and to master advanced echo techniques. My plans fulfilled, with unexpected opportunity to learn fetal echocardiography. I felt fully accepted as a team member, and I am grateful that I could be involved in every part of the work, with hands-on learning and profound discourses.

### **Impact:**

The fellowship in Japan remarkably enriched my competence and my mind. Practicing cardiology in such stimulating surroundings increased my learning pace and brought me another level of insightfulness in decision making.

No matter how much you plan, you can never predict the occasions that will occur and be alert and ready to recognize and embrace them. I believe your fellowship in Japan will for sure overcome your expectations.

