

“After my graduation I worked for one year. Then I realized that I enjoyed it researching.”

INTERVIEW with Risa Tamura



Risa Tamura has got a PhD from the Tokyo Medical and Dental University in Tokyo, Japan. She is doing research in the field of Sleep Medicine.

AIM: Why did you decide to do a PhD?

After my graduation I was working for one year. Then I realized that I enjoyed it when I had been researching or studying. Exploring knowledge is very interesting to me.

AIM: Why did you decide to choose this discipline?

When I was in the 6th year of my studies, I joined a APDSA meeting to have a presentation at their “student research program”. At that time, I saw a presentation about “*Sleep apnea syndrome*”, which was shown by Indonesian students. I have been interested in that subject ever since and I decided to enter the post-graduate course.

AIM: Why did you decide to choose this school/university?

I found three universities which had studies about the subject, then I chose the one, which is the nearest from where I had been working. I took the entrance exam and then I was searching for a new flat near the university.

AIM: Tell us about the advantages of your PhD.

I got deep understanding about my subject, I got to know how to do the research work. Furthermore, I had the opportunity

to familiarize with “*Evidence Based Medicine*” in clinical occasion.

AIM: What are the disadvantages?

Wasted time and that I didn’t earn money as a dentist, compare with my ex-classmates who didn’t take post-graduate course but have been working.

AIM: Was it worth? Why?

One crucial thing in doing a PhD is to choose the mentor “good or not-good”, and the circumstances are also important. I couldn’t do a good job in the first 2.5 years, because my department had been weaker after my ex-professor had retired. But I met my well-respected teacher who was in another department and now I got my PhD, thanks to him. I was also confused in those 4 years of doing the PhD. Sometimes I was proud of my PhD, but sometimes I was ashamed about wasting more time. In Japan, especially for a dental clinician, we have a saying about the PhD, “*A piece of rice under the bare foot.*” It means there is not enough of a big effect or good thing for the PhD holder, but they feel there is something under their bare foot. I think so, too, although I think its value must be my experience. My subject is not directly connected with daily main dental treatment, although I can think to connect the daily treatment (fillings or extracting...) with its related research to make



one more small step forward for the dental world. I think I like it now!

AIM: What are your future plans?

Nothing but just working. I had felt many times that I wasted time compared to my friends or ex-classmates who didn't enter the post-graduate course. They already have a lot of clinical skill and earn a lot of money. A few of them have already opened their own clinic and have success. Actually I am happy that I got a PhD, although at the same time I am not happy about

having less clinical skill for daily dental treatment than my friends or ex-classmates. Now I've started working very hard, nine hours a day, six days a week, and have no plans for my next research. I may not be back to university to continue my research in the next 5 years, although I am not sure if I will or I won't after that. After all, I think I was correct to do the PhD because I could have a mind of "*EBM (evidence based medicine)*". Now it is time to do other clinical things. I hope I will be able to come back to the field of research.

Answers on reasons for doing a PhD*

- I'm interested in taking issues and knowing about them in detail and eventually trying to solve them
- To work abroad
- I have a diagnosable mental illness
- I don't lose interest even if I fail to solve a problem, on the contrary, I get more interested in it and curious to know is there any solution at all
- I can't get a job
- To avoid working
- I had unrealistically optimistic ideas about the feasibility of my research aims
- I can't face the real world
- The elegant life style of academics and their reputation, flexibility to work according to my own ideas and thoughts, no private intervention
- It's cool to have a "Dr" before name
- The title opens doors (at the same time closes others)

Answers on reasons for doing a PhD*

- I would love to teach at university and a PhD is required for that
- I want to try something new
- To meet new people
- It offers intellectual stimulation, independent projects that nurture a love of discovery and the development of a skill set that opens a host of science-related opportunities for a budding scientist
- It is my personal challenge
- Just in case, you never know what can come in useful in your life
- For employment prospects
- My parents expect that
- I enjoy research
- My sibling(s) did it
- PhD was the easiest option to take after graduation
- My lecturer offered me the position to join him at the lab
- Being student is fun—a lot of freedom, few obligations
- I want the world to be better place to live
- I wanted to head a research group
- I couldn't think about anything else
- I feel it's too early to go into the job market
- I've always wanted to work on interesting things
- I think of myself as a freelancer

**By Magdalena Maciejowska, DDS, PhD, YDW Secretary General and Health Coordinator. Presented answers are coming from holders of PhD degree and PhD trainees, representing different professions from different countries and institutions. Source: interviews, discussions, literature, internet. The Author does not take any responsibility for any consequences following the reading of the article; intention was to give an overall picture of the topic.*