

My Experience at Niseko International Clinic

As a PGY5 Australian doctor from Brisbane, I arrived in Niseko after spending three years in General Surgery training and at a point where I was beginning the transition towards a career in General Practice. I was looking for a unique clinical experience and an opportunity to challenge myself in a different environment. What I found was one of the most rewarding professional and personal experiences of my career to date.



Clinically, Niseko International Clinic offered a breadth of medicine that is difficult to find anywhere else. Given Niseko's reputation as one of the world's premier ski destinations, a large proportion of presentations were related to snow sports injuries. Knees, shoulders and ankles featured heavily, ranging from ligamentous injuries and shoulder dislocations to significant fractures requiring urgent orthopaedic review and surgical intervention. As someone with a surgical background, I particularly enjoyed managing these cases and developing my skills in acute musculoskeletal assessment and injury management.

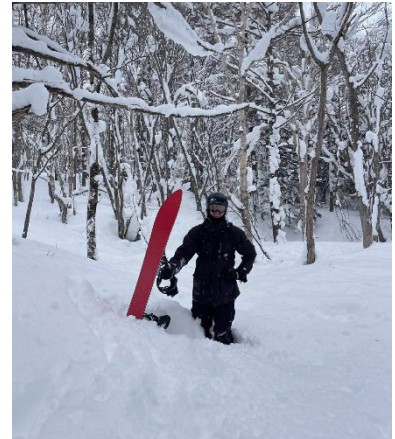
What surprised me most, however, was the diversity of medicine practised beyond the ski slopes. The clinic serves as a true primary care and urgent care hub for both international visitors and local residents. Alongside routine general practice presentations, we managed a dedicated fever clinic treating influenza, upper respiratory tract infections, gastroenteritis and other acute infectious illnesses brought to Niseko by travellers from around the globe.

We also encountered genuinely serious medical emergencies that required rapid assessment and decisive management. During the season I was involved in the care of patients presenting with acute pancreatitis, retinal detachments, significant head injuries with intracranial haemorrhage, and traumatic injuries such as clavicle fractures complicated by vascular injury. The unpredictability of the work meant every day was different, and it constantly challenged me to think broadly and remain adaptable.

One of the most valuable aspects of the experience was working within a highly collaborative multidisciplinary team. I had the opportunity to work closely alongside experienced nurses, physiotherapists, and Japanese physicians specialising in orthopaedics, emergency medicine and general practice. Despite coming from different training backgrounds and healthcare systems, everyone shared a common goal of providing excellent patient care. The willingness of colleagues to teach, support and learn from one another created an environment that was both professionally stimulating and genuinely enjoyable.

Outside the clinic, Niseko quickly became much more than a workplace. The seasonal community is unlike anything I have experienced elsewhere. Healthcare staff, ski instructors, hospitality workers and local residents all arrive from different parts of the world to share a winter in Hokkaido, united by a sense of adventure and a love of the mountains. It did not take long before familiar faces became close friends.

I lived in a self-contained apartment within walking distance of local amenities, making everyday life easy and comfortable. On days off, I took every opportunity to explore the surrounding region. Highlights included trips to Rusutsu, Kiroro, Lake Toya, Otaru and Yoichi, each offering a different perspective on Hokkaido's culture, landscapes and food. Whether it was skiing fresh powder after a night of snowfall, soaking in an onsen overlooking the mountains, or sharing meals with friends after work, the experiences outside the clinic were just as memorable as those within it.



For doctors considering the program, my advice is simple: say yes to the opportunity. The clinical exposure is exceptional, the learning curve is steep, and the support from the team is outstanding. But beyond the medicine, you will have the chance to live in one of the most beautiful winter destinations in the world, immerse yourself in a different culture, and form friendships that extend far beyond a single ski season.

I arrived in Niseko expecting an interesting medical job in a world-class ski resort. I left with new clinical skills, lifelong friendships, a deeper appreciation for community-based medicine, and memories that I will carry throughout my career. Few medical positions offer that combination of professional development, adventure and personal growth, which is what makes the experience so special.

