

Only the Beginning ...

KEIKO ASAO, M.D., M.P.H., PH.D., IS A U-M endocrinology fellow and native of Japan. She earned her medical degree at Tohoku University in Sendai, one of the areas most devastated by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan. Asao returned home in late March to join the humanitarian effort to help victims of the twin disasters.

INTERVIEW BY WHITLEY HILL
PHOTO BY J. ADRIAN WYLIE

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OUR CLINIC WAS IN A SHELTER IN a school. There were 700 people living there, but there wasn't a high volume of patients. People either died in the tsunami or they survived without injury. We saw things like asthma, respiratory infections, diabetes.

“We visited one community that extended into the sea, but it was high up. The cars couldn't get there so we had to walk. We saw many dead fish — even sharks — in the debris.

“What is needed now are doctors or nurses who can stay a couple of months to support the hospitals. In Kesenuma, essentially all the home health nurses died. The tsunami struck in the afternoon and they were all out visiting patients. So it's going to be very difficult to resume services. There's no temporary fix. This is only the beginning.”

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—KEIKO ASAO

