OSAMA Ibrahim’s inspiration for coming to Japan was the protagonist of a spy novel that thrilled him as a child. “He spoke multiple languages, was amazing at sports, and flew around the world in planes that he piloted himself. I wanted to become a pilot in the air force because I admired him, but my mother was strongly opposed to the idea, so I had to change my role model to a different character in the novel—an internationally successful doctor,” Ibrahim explains. He enrolled in Alexandria University’s Faculty of Medicine with the intent of becoming an ophthalmologist, a highly respected medical specialty in Egypt.

After graduating, he decided to study abroad to learn medical practices of a global standard. The United States and United Kingdom are common destinations for Egyptian doctors, but Ibrahim wanted somewhere different. “Comfortable environments do not interest me,” he notes. “Japan immediately came to mind. While studying in Italy I’d met a Japanese woman—who would later become my wife—and became interested in the country. I practiced karate as a child, which made me feel close to Japan, an economic superpower that rebuilt itself rapidly after the war. Another reason was Japan’s world-class medical technology in the field of ophthalmic treatments. “I hardly understood Japanese at the time, but during my four years in graduate school I committed myself to attaining the language skills needed to practice medicine,” he continues. “I

“Is there a challenge there?” Osama Ibrahim has followed this way of decision making at every fork in his life. A successful ophthalmologist who passed Japan’s national exam for medical practitioners, Ibrahim discusses the path he has walked and his dreams past and future.
wanted to tread a path that no Egyptian had walked before by passing Japan’s national exam for medical practitioners.”

Despite being busy with outpatient support, research, and preparation for academic conferences during his time at Keio University’s graduate school, Ibrahim studied Japanese for two hours every night before going to bed. He completed graduate studies that usually take four years in just three, and also earned the N1 certification on the tough Japanese-Language Proficiency Test. He received approval to take the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare’s national exam for medical practitioners and passed in 2016.

While Ibrahim speaks calmly and everything seems to have gone smoothly when he summarizes his past, his days were tough emotionally and physically. At times in Japan he had trouble seeing how he could actually become a doctor here. “However, Japanese volunteers helped me learn the language over Skype, I gained public speaking skills through my side job on an NHK Arabic language course, and I found ways to affirm that I was improving little by little,” he says with a smile.

He says he rediscovered Japan’s virtues after he started working as a doctor. “From hospital directors to the cleaning crew, staff members take pride in their roles and responsibilities. This is why the entire system works smoothly, which allows doctors to focus on healthcare without any extraneous worries.”

Ibrahim currently works at Tokyo Dental College’s Ichikawa General Hospital, which is known for its top-class outcomes for corneal transplants. “Here I want to learn the delicate and secure corneal transplant techniques that Japan is known for. Eventually I’d like to save patients in the Middle East who struggle with cataracts and other eye diseases. In addition, I receive many emails from medical students from Egypt and various other countries seeking advice on how to succeed as a doctor in Japan. I hope that sharing my experiences with them serves as the bridge that connects them to Japan,” Ibrahim says with a twinkle in his eye.

And his dreams outside of the medical field? “Well, I still cannot give up on my dream of becoming a pilot,” he muses. For Ibrahim, who consistently makes good on his commitments, obtaining a license to fly is a highly likely event.