

The land of the red, far-stretching plains and countless kangaroos – rural Victoria!

Recently I was granted the opportunity to travel to Bairnsdale in East Gippsland to get a feel for how the Aussie medical students did it at Monash. For two weeks, Sarah and I got to hang out with some pretty fantastic fellow medical students, explore the beautiful surrounding gumtree-laden bush, and fit in a little rural medicine in between.

For my first week, I was placed at a GP practice in Lake's Entrance – a small beach side holiday town. Cunninghame Arm Medical Centre is close to the estuary and the two-hour lunch breaks mean there should be enough time to get outside and enjoy the warm winter in between patients. We were lucky with the weather, and made the most of it with a boat ride through the lakes system on the weekend, seeing dolphins, seals, and the wild Tasman Sea. The practice itself comprises of about 9 GPs and a nurse assessment area. Going with the GPs allowed time to either sit in to observe their style, or see patients alone in a parallel consulting style. Dr Campbell is an enthusiastic teacher and a wealth of knowledge, and they all treated me just like one of their own year-long students. Other times were spent with the nurses, with plenty of opportunity to practice your ECG skills, wound cleaning and acute assessments. In terms of the medicine itself, the presentations and management were not too dissimilar from what I've seen in rural New Zealand. Learning the different computer software was probably the hardest part!



The beautiful countryside and shoreline of Lake's Entrance

For the second week, I moved from Lake's Entrance to Bairnsdale, a larger country town of about 15,000 people and a "small" hospital that seemed pretty flash, coming from little Balclutha! My first day was spent in ED, with lots of the common presentations of elderly people having fallen, middle-aged people with tummy pain and little kids who actually seem pretty well. However the investigations and management is remarkably different compared to what I've been used to this year. For example. all patients with falls get a head and neck CT, and possibly an abdo one too. This ready-availability of expensive imaging was illustrated again the next day when I was on the rehab ward with the doctor

ordering an MRI in a very blasé manner, especially for a rural setting. ED was great for hands-on experience, as I was able to see and assess patients on my own and take bloods. All the doctors were very friendly and more than happy to teach, even though I was only with them for a day. The rehab ward was a little quieter, giving us the opportunity to knock off early and explore the local bush with the other students.

Another highlight of the two weeks was being in Bairnsdale to experience NAIDOC week, celebrating Aboriginal history, culture and achievements. It was both heartbreaking and heart warming to listen to the stories from the elders about the suffering their ancestors had to endure and all that they achieved despite this. Indigenous health in Australia, much like in New Zealand, is still quite far behind that of the rest of the population, and so it was inspiring to see such a dedicated group of people, including Dr Campbell from Lake's Entrance, working towards changing this.

Overall, the exchange to East Gippsland was a fantastic experience, and was definitely made so by all the wonderful people at Monash, Bairnsdale hospital and Cunninghame Arm who made us feel so welcome.



NAIDOC week celebrations at Bairnsdale Hospital, featuring some spectacular digeridoo playing



Koala-spotting in Bairnsdale

By Georgia Bromiley