

Australian Exchange (Kalgoorlie) 2017

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We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we return home.

– **Australian Aboriginal Proverb**

In July 2017 I was lucky enough to be given the opportunity to be placed in rural Western Australia for two weeks of my 5th year medical training. I was placed at Kalgoorlie Hospital in the city of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, which is in the goldfields 595km inland from Perth. The town has a population of over 32,000 people and was founded in 1893 during the gold rush. The largest employer in the area is the 'Super pit', an open cut gold mine, which is over 3 km long.

The evening my fellow RMIP classmate and I landed in Kalgoorlie we were greeted at the airport by staff from the medical school who took us to our accommodation. There we met some of the Australian rural medical students. They had just started their mid year break but were still happy to take us out for dinner and show us around the town.

The next day we started at the hospital. Kalgoorlie Hospital has an incredibly large catchment area, with some patients having travelled over 900km to attend clinics. While in Kalgoorlie I was on the Paediatric and General Medicine teams. I found the medicine there to be really interesting. There were many indigenous Australian patients, as well as a surprisingly large amount of New Zealanders (who move to Kalgoorlie to work in the mines). The majority of doctors at the hospital were locums from Perth, but there were consultants from overseas including New Zealand. In fact one of the mothers of a fellow RMIP student was working as a locum in ED while I was there.

The super pit



Kalgoorlie Hospital

The doctors at the hospital were incredibly welcoming. They took us out for dinner (weekly pasta nights), invited us over to watch movies (they made me watch "Australia"—an Aussie classic) and made us home cooked meals. One of the consultant paediatricians was also kind enough to lend us her car for the weekend so we could road trip through the outback. We ended up driving to a seaside town called Esperance, four hours away. This is another rural town where the Australian rural medical students are placed. It is an amazing location with beautiful beaches and national parks. I was told by almost every person I met in Kalgoorlie to make sure I visited Esperance, and I'm glad I did.



Twilight Bay- near Esperance

While we were in Kalgoorlie it was NAIDOC week, which was a celebration of the languages and culture of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders. During this festival we were able to try traditional bush tucker including crocodile, kangaroo, and emu, as well as many native plants. We were able to watch performances in the Aboriginal language put on by the local children and choir. There was also a traditional market and photographs of historically prominent Aboriginal people so that we could learn more about their stories.



Overall it was an amazing trip. I was able to meet and get to know great people and see some amazing places. I think that rural healthcare delivery in New Zealand and Australia is quite similar—Australia just does it on a greater geographic scale. This trip has been incredibly valuable and has reinforced my interest in Rural Medicine.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the RMIP program and the Dunedin School of Medicine for the opportunity to do this exchange. It was amazing and I encourage all future RMIP students to apply.