

# Australian Rural Exchange 2017

## Sale, Central Gippsland – Monash University

This year I was given the amazing opportunity to participate in a rural medical exchange with Australia. While a medical student from Australia came and filled in my spot in Balclutha for 2 weeks, I jumped into his place in Sale, one of sites of the Monash University School of Rural Medicine.



Sale is a small town of about 15,000 people 3 hours east of Melbourne. The main industries are dairy farming and offshore oil drilling.

I arrived in Sale late on a very frosty Sunday night. All my delusional hopes of escaping the cold in New Zealand were quickly dashed as Sale experienced a record low of -6 degrees overnight!

I spent my first week working at a local GP clinic. There, the medical students had their own rooms with their own door placards, and their own patients that were specifically booked with them. After consulting with the patient I would then call in the doctor who was supervising me in between seeing his own patients. It was interesting and challenging at the same time to see that while on the whole, the medicine is much the same, there are several differences in the Australian healthcare system compared to ours, and I spent a lot of time discussing it with my classmates. For example, there is no ACC or the like in Australia (except for workplace incidents only). And unless a patient has a special concession card (like the equivalent of a Community Services Card), their prescriptions will cost around \$37. So many times I heard a doctor say "Go and buy some paracetamol and/or ibuprofen," but never once was a prescription for paracetamol or ibuprofen given. My classmates were quite surprised that in New Zealand we commonly give scripts for over-the-counter drugs.

These are just examples of the little things I learned while "dipping my toes" into the Australian healthcare system. I also got to hear patients say things you just don't often hear in New Zealand, such as replying to the doctor's question about asthma triggers with "bushfires" or talking about the struggles of having their dog fall into a wombat hole.



In my second week I spent three days on the paediatric ward at the hospital. The hospital has a surgical ward, a medical ward, a Women and Children's ward, a small Critical Care unit, an ED, and three operating theatres. The paediatric ward was very quiet while I was there but I learned a lot from questioning the resident and making rounds through the ward and the prem nursery. I saw a case of severe child abuse in an 11 week old baby, which was difficult.

My classmates were very friendly and we spent our time once off work hanging out together, going to the pub for the classic Australian chicken parma, and eating a lot of chocolate cake while making fun of each other's accents and slang words. We had some evening tutorials together and their curriculum was near identical to ours so I could learn and contribute alongside them. Aboriginal health is not really studied in Australian medical school – they can refer a patient to be seen by an Aboriginal liaison, but they have not been trained in cultural competency to the degree we are in New Zealand. I passionately shared about the disparities we strive to address in New Zealand and how they have come about, and about our Hauora Māori module at our school. It was interesting to see how the concepts that seem inherent to us were novel to them. I also wasn't used to being called out every time Te Reo words unconsciously slipped into my speech, or to seeing everybody sit on the desks in the ward!



I also explored a little bit of Sale in my spare time, wandering through the botanic gardens and around the lake and seeing the flocks of magpies, ravens, ibis, peacocks, and a wee reminder of home: pukeko. On a sunny (but cold!) Sunday afternoon a few of my classmates took me out for a historic boat ride on the river from the Port of Sale to the old rotary swing bridge, one of only a few in the world. We didn't see any koala in the trees that day but could see where Aboriginal people

had carved the bark off the trees to form canoes. Thursday evenings were spent with my classmate/flatmate at gymnastics class – continually scaring the instructor with my combination of fearlessness and ineptitude.



I had a wonderful time and wished I could have stayed longer! Thank you to Monash University in Central Gippsland for having me and looking after me so well, and a huge thank you to RMIP for making it all possible!

**Bridget Thorp (Balclutha)**