

Nat's Kalgoorlie Experience- Red dust, roos and more red dust!

Kalgoorlie: A town that still sleeps on a Sunday! With its old-fashioned facades and corrugated iron cottages it felt strangely like we had stepped back in time. We were met by a trio of very welcoming rural clinical school staff and set off on our 2 weeks of adventure. In this small mining town in the whops of Western Australia we were met with crows the size of chickens, an abundance of red dirt and eucalyptus trees as well as a significant resident population of Kiwis (the people not the birds).

Our first adventure involved getting acquainted with the rural flying doctors' base before heading out to an indigenous community. Unfortunately, the weather had other plans and we couldn't land due to low cloud. A good practice run! Better luck was had the next week when we flew to a roadhouse at the end of a 145.6 km stretch of dead straight highway (apparently one of the longest straights in the world!). We set up clinic in a spare hotel room and proceeded to examine, inject and take bloods from some of the staff who work in this roadhouse, 400 km from the nearest town. I was beginning to get a taste of how huge Australia is!

On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, we spent time at BEGA, a local clinic which was set up to cater for the healthcare of the Aboriginal population. The facilities included a mothers and babies' clinic, point of care testing (ACR, HbA1C, basic electrolytes etc.), transport to the clinic, a gym, crèche, visiting dentists, renal and other specialists. We spent time with both the doctors and Aboriginal healthcare workers. From what I observed, the diseases which most impact the Aboriginal population are similar to those we see in Maori populations, for example, premature heart and kidney disease, diabetes and obesity. However, I was shocked by how common it was for men in their 20's and 30's to have had an MI or be on dialysis. These health problems seem to hit hard and hit young. We were privileged to arrive during Naidoc week- a week dedicated to celebrating Aboriginal culture. It was exciting to see people, particularly the young indigenous generation, singing, dancing and celebrating a culture which has for years been hidden and opposed. Particularly moving was a rap by a group of young boys who were highlighting the issue of depression and suicide in their communities. Hopefully these steps, though small, are steps towards equity in health.

Thursday and Friday were hospital days. Kalgoorlie hospital is fairly big for rural standards (130 beds) and it was pretty similar to being in the hospital at home (Greymouth). We dabbled in paediatrics, general medicine and ED. Among other things I got to go to a code blue call (for a potentially dying patient...they didn't die), practice IV's on a dummy arm, stitch, debride and dress a burn, go to teaching with the junior docs and check out a local café with the paediatric team. It was interesting navigating the differences in our health systems- where funding comes from, scripts that all need to be signed by patients, a lack of ACC...It helped me to appreciate parts of NZ's health system much more!

Along the way there were plenty of interesting experiences: holding a 6-month old baby roo, meeting a pet snake, visiting sculptures in a dried up lake (the red mud is still lurking on my shoes), standing above the 'super pit' (the biggest open cast gold mine in Aussie), writing my name on a pub wall, having kangaroo steak for tea and playing many games of Uno with a 6-year-old!

This trip has been a real privilege. I've met some awesome people and have gotten an idea of how rural medicine works in a very different setting. It's been an eye opener to aspects of Aboriginal health, racism and the attempts to mitigate this. It was well organised and we were very well looked after. Thank you to all the people in Australia and NZ who made this trip possible. Perhaps Kalgoorlie will see me again!



