

Australian Rural Exchange 2015

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During the first two weeks of July 2015 I had the incredible experience of being part of the medical student exchange with one of the students from Monash School of Rural Health, East Gippsland. During my two weeks I stayed in Bairnsdale, which is a small town with a population of around 13,000 people, and a four hour train ride east of Melbourne. Bairnsdale is situated alongside the Mitchell River, and surrounded by many beautiful Lakes which are popular holidaying spots – quite similar to Blenheim with the Wairau River and surrounding Marlborough Sounds.

My two weeks consisted of a huge variety of medicine. My clinical placements included Theatre, ED, GPs clinics and a morning in the local Indigenous Health Clinic. The hospital in Bairnsdale is a similar size to Wairau Hospital but has a different structure with only a couple of full time consultants and other visiting locums. The role of the GP's in Bairnsdale is to do part general practice at one of the local clinics and part specialist work in the hospital. GP's look after their clinic's patients when they are admitted to hospital and also work as specialists in areas such as anaesthetics or obstetrics. I was intrigued by this set-up as it appears to be excellent for the doctors as they get a lot of diversity in their work and also for the patients as it provides continuity of care from primary to secondary healthcare. All the doctors I spent time with during my clinical placements were welcoming and willing to teach, making each day a pleasant and productive learning experience.

During my time in Bairnsdale I also joined in with the other 4th Year (equivalent to our 5th year) Monash students in their weekly tutorials. This was a great opportunity to get to know the other medical students and furthermore a good learning experience as they are covering similar specialities to us this year including paediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology, and psychiatry. On my final day in Bairnsdale I also had the pleasure of joining the other students as a teddy doctor at Teddy Bear Hospital.

The facilities at the Monash School of Rural Health were excellent with a huge building dedicated to the students in Bairnsdale which has tutorial rooms, a common room, clinical skills centre and a high-tech video conferencing board room. The other large difference I noted between our rural programmes was the different outlooks surrounding rural medicine. Every one of the nine other 4th year medical students based in the Bairnsdale region for 2015 all got balloted to spend the year as a rural student.



This is the complete opposite to what we have in New Zealand with the rural programme being very popular with 100% voluntariness to participate in the year long programme. On discussion with the other students they suggested the differences may be due to increased numbers of rural spots at Monash compared to the limited 20 we have at Otago. Nevertheless, the students I met in Bairnsdale were all enjoying their rural year and had a good attitude towards the programme.

There were many highlights for me during my two weeks in Bairnsdale. These included the opportunity to practice clinical medicine overseas, exploring the beautiful scenery, observing wildlife (I saw a koala and kangaroo in the wild for the first time), and most importantly the people that I met. Firstly, the three other medical students I flatted with, were great hosts and were fun to explore the region with. Secondly, the staff at the Monash Campus were a lovely group of ladies who were very welcoming, going out of their way to make sure I was having a good time. I am very thankful to them for organising such a great two weeks of medicine for me.



Overall this exchange has been an absolutely incredible opportunity as it was the first time I have lived in a new country by myself and also the first time that I had experienced medicine abroad. Furthermore this exchange has made me even more certain that rural medicine is what I want to be a part of in the future.

I would like to say a huge thank you to RMIP for providing me with this opportunity, I am very grateful to have been a part of this awesome exchange.

