

Australia Essay

I was fortunate enough to be granted the opportunity to travel to Kalgoorlie, WA, for two weeks under the rural medical immersion program. What an experience! My primary interest and reason for applying, is a personal interest in indigenous medicine, and this was an experience that really focused on that.

During our stay, we were hosted by the Rural Clinical School of WA, who were very generous hosts. We worked between the local hospital in Kalgoorlie, as well as Bega, an aboriginal health service and the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). All three provided valuable insight into rural Australian medicine. RFDS highlighted just how big the area was that they covered. We were fortunate enough to travel with them to some outreach clinics, giving us the opportunity to see more of WA and meet more people.

In Kalgoorlie at the hospital and Bega, we worked alongside a lot of different specialties and people. The hospital offered most general specialties and Bega offered a unique approach to health care, which was tailored at improving health care from the pregnancy, right through life. I found it inspiring to watch such a passionate team working for the improvement of the lives of the indigenous people. I personally really enjoyed the opportunity to work closely with these teams, and feel I have a lot to bring back to New Zealand with respect to Māori health. I felt that I walked away with a lot of insight and ideas about what we could do differently here in New Zealand.

Another particular highlight of the trip was that during our stay was the national NAIDOC week. This is a week that celebrates all that is the culture and history of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. For myself, this was a real highlight. At the end of the week, we attended a closing ceremony/concert, featuring well known Aboriginal musicians. One of these, Archie Roach, was a stand out figure. Born at the tail end of the stolen generation, his music tells stories of his childhood, upbringing, and what it meant to be proud of the colour of your skin. I found this evening very moving, humbling and inspiring, but most of all, I felt privileged to be a part of such an extraordinary event.

The hospital truly embellished what it means to me to be a rural hospital. They work closely in conjunction with the RFDS, and between them, cover an enormous amount of land. Consequently, the medicine I observed there was very interesting. There were the very clear problems of diabetes, particularly on the Aboriginal population. Secondary problems, such as ulcers were also very common. Given the geographic nature of this area, there would also often be transfers in and out Kalgoorlie, whether that be to Perth, or arriving from the desert via the planes.

The role of the RFDS in the desert is incredible. We were privileged enough to spend some time with them during our stay. The range of medicine and sheer remoteness of the job is what makes it so amazing. I thoroughly enjoyed being able to travel with them and get to know what it means to be a remote responding doctor in the deserts of Australia.

I must thank a number of groups for making this trip possible for myself and the other students. Firstly to RMIP for funding such an amazing experience. I cannot thank you enough. To the Rural Clinical School of WA, you are running an amazing program for your students and your generosity you showed us was incredible. Thank you. Lastly, thank you to the people of Australia that we worked with. You have taught me a lot, and given me even more to think about. This is an experience I will never forget.