

RMIP Australian Exchange 2016

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In July I was incredibly fortunate to travel on an exchange to Monash School of Rural Health, Gippsland. I was based in Sale, a town in the Australian state of Victoria, which has a population of 13,000 people and is situated three hours east of Melbourne if travelling by car or train.

For the first week I was posted in the GP practice for 3 days. Like General Practice in New Zealand, I encountered a wide range of presentations, from hypertension and skin infections, through to the first presentation of a woman who probably had metastatic melanoma. I got lots of hands on experience in a primary care experience as I saw patients before the

GP did, and devised a preliminary management plan. Luckily the management of conditions did not differ too greatly from New Zealand, so I had some ideas about management most of the time!

My first week in Australia also happened to be NAIDOC week- a week devoted to celebrating aboriginal culture. This meant that I was fortunate enough to experience cultural displays, such as a traditional aboriginal dance (pictured to the right), and meant that some tutors took it as an opportunity to talk about aboriginal health.



For the second week I was posted on Obstetrics and Gynaecology where I attended ward rounds and



clinics, as well as being on call for the birthing suite. I felt incredibly fortunate to spend two days with a fertility specialist in theatre. I got to watch a few different surgeries- including egg retrievals for In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF). He is the only fertility specialist who services East Gippsland, and provides fertility treatment in the smaller centres so that patients do not have to travel to Melbourne. It turned out that not only was he knowledgeable on the subject, he had written OSCE books for students. For this reason it was not only a fantastic learning experience but very much expanded my understanding of the area.



I really enjoyed orientating myself in a different healthcare system through first hand clinical experience- it made me realise that you can learn a lot about your own healthcare system by working in healthcare in a different country. There were two major differences between the New Zealand and the Australian Healthcare system which I found very striking. Because they don't have PHARMAC in Australia, the range of drugs is a lot greater, although you did have to consider the cost of medication far more than you would in New Zealand. Another major difference was the lack of an equivalent organization to ACC. A patient that I saw was currently in a court

battle with previous employers with regards to a work injury, which really made me appreciate how lucky we are to have a blame free scheme.

The quality of teaching and the medical school facilities were very high in Sale. The medical school building is directly adjoined the hospital and was fully equipped with a simulation lab, multiple tutorial rooms, a modern common room and a small library. I couldn't believe that this was all there to service the needs of just 16 medical students; eight third year students, and eight fourth year students (equivalent to fourth and fifth year in New Zealand). Students have teaching for two days a week, in addition to three days of placement. Instead of travelling to receive teaching from specialists as we do in RMIP, specialist teaching is carried out in the rural centre. Where a specialist was not available in Sale, we video conferenced another centre. We had a lot of teaching in psychiatry and paediatrics in my time in Australia. In my second week I travelled to Bairnsdale with the fourth year students for teaching in medical law and ethics.

In addition to my very valuable clinical experience, meeting a whole group of medical students from another country enhanced my experience. My classmates went beyond the call of duty to ensure I made the most of my time in Sale. This entailed a cycling tour of the area, a Mexican fiesta potluck dinner, going to a gig at the local pub, and multiple pub quiz nights. In my first night in Sale the students were absolutely shocked that I had no idea what a "Parma", so we all went out for dinner at the local pub so I could try this fine Aussie cuisine- a large piece of chicken schnitzel with ham, tomato and cheese on top.

This exchange was a truly enriching experience and I have walked away with valuable clinical knowledge and plenty of new friends and connections. A huge thank-you to RMIP for providing me with this incredible opportunity.

