

## Kalgoorlie, Western Australia

I had the privilege of being selected to go on an exchange to the Rural School of Western Australia. I spent two weeks Kalgoorlie, hosted by the local RCS students. This is a mining town 595 km east of Perth, which has an estimated population of over 32,000, and home to 3.6 km long open-cut gold mine called the Super Pit, which can be seen from the moon (fig. 1). The Kalgoorlie Health Campus is a 131-bed inpatient facility, similar to the size of Grey Base Hospital where I am based this year.

*Figure 1 Super Pit*

We spent the first week in Paediatrics with a great team of doctors, which was hugely beneficial as I have had limited exposure in this speciality thus far. During this week I attended ward rounds, clinics, and emergencies with the on-call doctor, as well as examined patients



on the ward. During this time, I saw many Aboriginal patients who had come from very remote communities, including as far as 12 hours drive away. These locations would only have a flight once a week, making it very difficult to get patients home. I saw many interesting presentations, including Rheumatic Fever, Renal Atrophy, and scabies. I also got to assist in providing continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) to a preterm baby, and do many baby checks, which was a great learning experience. The following week we spent time in obstetrics and gynaecology, during which I got to attend multiple clinics and attend any births on the ward. I also got some great one on one teaching from the Registrars and Consultants when it was quiet.

We also spent a day at Bega Garnbirringu Health Service which is a free GP service designed for the Aboriginal community. At the start of the day we went on the van which picks up patients to bring them to the clinic. There weren't many patients that morning, so the driver showed me where the Aboriginal people often camp if they have nowhere to sleep, as well as short stay locations for patients from remote communities that have been in hospital. In the clinic the patients I saw had multiple co-morbidities. One patient had diagnosed diabetes with an HbA1c of 97 mmol/mol (11%) alongside heart failure symptoms but wasn't adherent to medications, therefore was very poorly controlled. The same patient had an abscess which was surgically drained but had no way of getting to the hospital over the weekend for daily dressings. This demonstrates a snapshot of Aboriginal Health and its deficiencies, which was one of the most striking aspects of healthcare in Kalgoorlie.

On our weekend spare we planned a trip to Esperance on the South Coast, which is known for its beaches (fig. 2). We went with three of the junior doctors on the beginning of their mandatory three-month rotation at Kalgoorlie Hospital. We visited Lucky Bay which has sand so fine that it squeaks when you walk on it and feels like flour! We also walked up Frenchman's Peak at Cape Le Grand National Park, which had great views of the park.

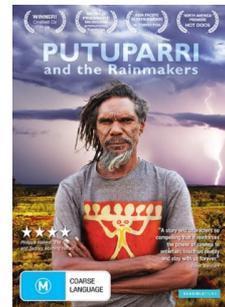


*Figure 2 Esperance*

During our time in Kalgoorlie we also volunteered for Red Cross, delivering soup to the poorer parts of the community (fig. 3). Many of these people were Aboriginal, some of which were families with small children. This was a valuable experience and would highly recommend it to future students. I also attended the Tuesday night Quiz nights at a local pub with some of the junior doctors, but unfortunately, we lost to the Surgical Team!



*Figure 3 Soup Patrol*



During our stay it was also NAIDOC week, which is the time of year Australia celebrates the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Unfortunately, many of the events occurred while we were placed in the hospital, but we attended a great documentary called Putuparri and the Rainmakers, which gave some insight into Aboriginal culture.

Overall it was an incredibly valuable experience and helped me gain insight into the deficiencies in Aboriginal healthcare, and the challenges which come with having a country of such a large geographical size. I am very grateful to RMIP and to the Rural Clinical School of Western Australian for this amazing opportunity, and the RCS students for hosting us at their flat.

By Lauren Smith