

## My medical elective down under

As any medical student will know, your elective is the light at the end of a seemingly never-ending tunnel of education. In your fourth year at Sheffield, you are given a 7 week period where you have the freedom to organise your own placement in any specialty, in any hospital and most excitingly, in any country.

I chose Sydney Australia for several reasons. Due to the increasing number of claims about UK doctors fleeing to Australia following the junior doctor contract negotiations, I was interested to see for myself the alleged 'better' work-life balance that has apparently drawn so many in. Additionally, I felt more comfortable with the idea of working in a westernised healthcare setting whilst training so I could improve my knowledge and skill set before qualifying. There is often dispute about whether students should visit less developed healthcare systems, yet I felt that I would be able to offer more and be of greater value as an experienced doctor in the future.



Sydney Opera House

My placement was based at Nepean, a hospital on the outskirts of western Sydney, in a small town called Penrith. Having not had a respiratory placement in the UK as of yet, I was keen to gain experience in such a fundamental department before entering my final year of medical school. Initially, I was unsure what to expect but soon I came to realise that it was not dissimilar to the NHS I am used to. I was thrown in to assessing patients presenting to the Emergency Department with difficulty breathing and was able to practice my practical skills as part of my management plan. There was also opportunity to attend specialist respiratory clinics and witness how patients in the community were monitored and cared for.



What I found most interesting was the lasting effects the prejudices against Aborigines have had on today's society. An Aboriginal Liaison Officer is an important role that provides support for patients and their families in hospital and ensures equal access to healthcare services. This is because of how extensive Indigenous discrimination was only a few decades ago, with full recognition as citizens and equal rights being granted in the 1960s. It is of paramount importance that those of indigenous descent have equal access to care, especially since I witnessed a higher prevalence of respiratory disease in this demographic, as well as a substantial decrease in life expectancy compared to non-indigenous dwellers.

The public and private systems appeared to live symbiotically, however, I was informed of the significant disparity between treatment and outcomes for patients depending on their region. This was partially due to access to services and the proportion of Aborigines, but also because of lack of funding and education in the more rural areas.

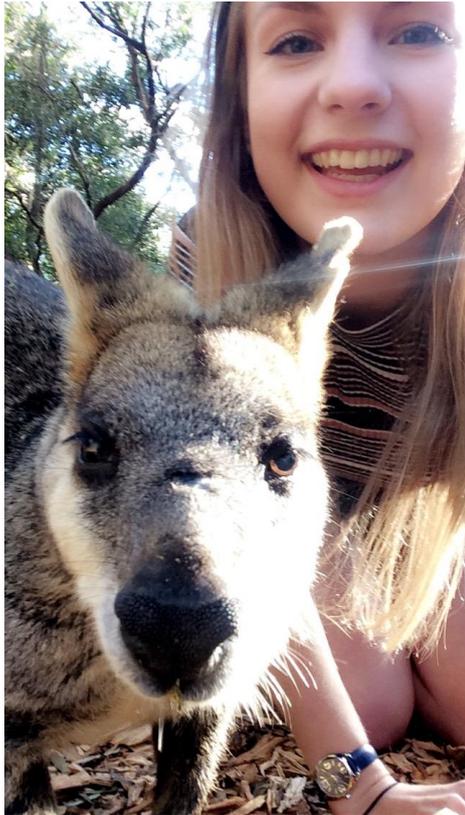
This became more apparent during my week experience with the New South Wales NETS team (Newborn and paediatric Emergency Transport System). I had the privilege of being able to shadow the specialist-trained doctors and nurses based in Sydney, who were responsible for the safe transportation of critically ill children across the state (which is approximately four times the size of the UK!) It was surprising how isolated GPs were in the Australian outback, with minimal support and resources compared to those in the NHS. Frequently, NETS receive calls from a GP requiring guidance on an acutely unwell child who have presented to them, since there would often be little emergency care available, if none. NETS is an innovative organisation which has installed cameras to almost all practices and hospitals in NSW so they can provide the best assessment and advice on treatment from thousands of miles away, and if necessary, are able to deploy teams to take over and transfer to better equipped hospitals in the city.



NETS Heli-pad

The majority of call-outs can be reached by ambulance but teams can also be sent by helicopter or fixed-wing aircrafts to the more western locations, which can take up to six hours just to travel to. Once by the patient's bedside, they are advised to ensure their stability before transporting them further, and from experience, this can be an unpredictable length of time. The teams told me about some of their shifts of extraordinary lengths but what was most evident was the sense of accomplishment expressed by each member and the feeling of unity among the professionals, drivers and pilots, which seemed to be a fundamental part to NETS' success.

I had the time of my life in Australia, not only as a student in the hospital or witnessing state-of-the-art paediatric medicine, but also having the opportunity to see the other side of the world. It is rare to have much time off as you progress through medicine, since it is essentially an apprenticeship, so I am incredibly grateful to be able to have made the most of my time away from Sheffield. It is an incredible country with such a diverse climate and an immeasurable amount of natural wonders - I would like to say huge thank you once again to the Old Waconian for aiding me in achieving what was my dream elective!



Making friends!



Great Barrier Reef