

Ryan Breslin Medical Elective, Summer 2013, Adelaide, South Australia

The first four weeks of my elective was spent with the Royal Adelaide Hospital Trauma Service in Adelaide, South Australia. This is one of only two dedicated services specifically for adult trauma patients in South Australia and sees approximately 1800 cases per year. I shadowed the trauma registrar: the doctor responsible for the immediate assessment, stabilisation and management of all trauma patients. I learned how to assess the critically ill patient as well as the principles of trauma management, and got hands on by assisting in their care. In addition I attended teaching sessions in the hospital on general emergency medicine and attended a practical session in an animal model laboratory where I learned how to insert chest drains on anaesthetised animals. I saw a number of trauma patients that required interventions I would be unlikely to see anywhere else, including one very severely injured patient for whom a resuscitative thoracotomy was attempted (open chest surgery in the emergency department – no time to wait for theatre!).

When there were no trauma patients I assisted in the resuscitation room with medical (non-trauma) patients. Here I gained experience of a wide range of acute conditions and was able to get even more hands on. On one evening shift I was involved in the successful resuscitation of a patient with hypothermia that had an exceptionally prolonged cardiac arrest (1hr 20mins), thus learning a very valuable lesson about not giving up! Given the rarity of such a case I have also gained a potential publication as the consultant involved is keen that we publish it as a case report.

The final three weeks of my elective were spent with MedSTAR – an emergency medical retrieval team that uses road, helicopter and fixed wing aircraft for adult and paediatric retrievals both within South Australia and further afield. I went to a number of road traffic collisions both by road and helicopter, and was also involved in transferring a number of critically ill patients on ventilators by road. My favourite transfer however was one from Alice Springs (Northern Territory) to Adelaide by Learjet! I learned not only about the challenges of managing severely injured patients outside of a hospital environment, but also of the specific problems one might face when having to plan a transfer in a cramped space with limited resources. The MedSTAR Kids team were also keen to take me on jobs and I helped retrieve a number of very young and premature babies.

Adelaide as a city was great fun – with coastline on one side of the city and spectacular mountains and countryside on the other there was plenty to do and see! I went hiking, walking, swimming, to museums, galleries and bars over the weekends and made lots of friends along the way! I loved the country and very much hope to return soon!