

## **Medicine Down Under**

For me choosing where to go on elective was quite an easy decision; for years I have wanted to explore 'Down Under' and felt that this was the perfect opportunity to spend some time in the country as a visitor whilst also gaining an appreciation for what it was like to live and work in Australia. I personally felt more comfortable visiting an English speaking country and had never really considered going anywhere else. As such I was very relieved back in July 2014 (yes, applications open that early) when I was accepted into the elective program at Royal North Shore Hospital (RNSH).

My decision on the location of my elective initially predominantly based on somewhere I wanted to explore, however in time I became quite interested in seeing how medicine was practiced in a country where there was a great deal of private healthcare. Having only ever experienced healthcare delivered by the NHS, I was intrigued as to how the public and private sectors might work together. I was surprised to see that they complemented each other quite well for the benefit of patients using both systems. This was especially clear during my placement in inpatient Oncology. I only worked in the public hospital, my understanding is that junior doctors, let alone medical students, rarely wander over into the private hospital, but it was interesting to see how much the private hospital supported the public care that some received. No matter whether the patient was public or privately funded the ward team aimed to give each patient the most suitable care. The staff at the private hospital liaised directly with those in RNSH to transfer eligible patients as quickly as possible with the focus being to free beds in the public wards rather than to move private patients to the more comfortable private wards. This was driven by the desire to get any inpatient Oncology patient on to the quieter inpatient Oncology ward that had family spaces, equipment and staff much more appropriate for patient's needs. Initially I wouldn't have thought that the focus of the private hospital would be to try to do what was best for all patients rather than just focusing on their own. Another consequence I noticed that appeared caused by the prevalent private healthcare was that people were much more 'medicalised' than in the UK. It was surprising to see patients so well educated and so involved with their own health compared with the UK which I feel overall is certainly a more positive thing and definitely appeared to help promote more healthy behavior such as weight loss and smoking cessation.

Although I strongly believe in and support the free at point of care service that the NHS provides, it was comforting to know that should the decision to bring more private care into UK medical practice be made that there was a more sustainable and functional model that that of the US that we could hopefully follow.

One of the other important elements in planning and elective is deciding which specialty you want to experience. At Cambridge our only experience in Emergency Medicine comes in final year and as such I thought it would be the perfect specialty to experience in Sydney. In addition to being new, I also hoped that it would stretch my knowledge as patients present with any combination of symptoms at the hospital door. This was something I experienced upon first stepping foot into the Emergency Department at RNSH on Monday morning. Immediately after introducing myself to one of the Staff Specialists (Consultants) working in the main ED arena I was taken under the wing of a junior doctor who put me to work: Venous blood gases, Cannulas, Urine dips, ABGs and ECGs all completed before I had had the chance to ask where was the best place to buy lunch in the hospital! This pace continued for

the 4 weeks I spent in the department and I feel that the challenge presented in working across a number of different systems and the need to work quickly has set me in good stead not only for my A+E placement as a student but also for my final general medical and surgical placements. I sincerely hope to become as efficient an FY1 as some of the interns I met in the RNSH Emergency Department.

In total I spent 7 weeks in Sydney living in the city centre next to the loud, yet convenient, Central station and commuting 40 minutes to RNSH, a large tertiary hospital on the North Shore. I chose RNSH as it was the only one offering an elective Emergency Department placement during the dates when we take our elective. In retrospect I was lucky that I had chosen to first apply to RNSH as, after meeting other students who were based in different hospitals, I found out just how large Sydney really is.

I'm pleased that I chose to live in the centre rather than being closer to the hospital as I managed to explore the fantastic city that Sydney is. Whilst I spent a good amount of time on the wards gaining experience and learning from the doctors I also had the opportunity to visit a little more Australia both on land in Melbourne and on sea on the Great Barrier Reef. My weekend up on the Reef and my first experience Scuba Diving is definitely one of the most memorable weekends I have spent and has since certainly ignited a love for diving and the need to quickly obtain my PADI certification!

In all thoroughly enjoyed my Elective and both learnt a lot of 'hands on' medicine whilst gaining an appreciation for a different system of medical care. My elective certainly met my expectations and the only thing I can say that I didn't enjoy were the rather long flights to and from Australia! Overall it was also great to have the chance to explore such an amazing country to which I am eager to return.