

Experiences of a rural doctor

Hi, I am 23 year old fifth year medical student from Bunbury, Western Australia. This year I was based in Narrogin (~5000 people in the wheatbelt area of inland WA) as part of the Rural Clinical School (RCS) of Western Australia. I enjoyed the opportunity to immerse myself in rural life, joining a local hockey team, participating in local group activities and working and studying with the local GPs, hospital staff, allied health and midwives.

In terms of my goals for the year, I actively sought opportunities to promote medicine as a career to Narrogin students - I assisted with the Medicine workshop held at Narrogin Senior High School, coordinated by Rural Health West. With the assistance of RAMUS (Rural Australian Medical Undergraduate Scholarship) conference funding, I attended the Rural Doctors Association of Queensland conference in Cairns, it was a great opportunity to network with other rural doctors and discuss future career prospects. I really enjoyed the chance to discuss family life and how to juggle this with work and living in the country with other female GPs with families. I also attended several conferences and education sessions run by the Great Southern GP Network and the Greater Bunbury Division of General Practice in Albany and Bunbury.

I have developed further understanding of rural GP life, Narrogin has had quite a doctor shortage this year and the doctors have really struggled to cope with the demand and keep up with the running of the hospital. It was great to see how the community rallied around and was understanding of the problem. My plans are to return to a rural location to live and work when I graduate, at this stage my interests are in the Rural General Practice Pathway, Emergency Medicine, Obstetrics and Anaesthetics. I would love to eventually settle down in a town of around 5000 population.

During the year we had to undertake two options units which I chose to do in Bunbury (in Anaesthetics) and Atherton QLD (working in Emergency Medicine). I delivered 13 babies and assisted with 10 others, I sutured, canulated, plastered, and assessed numerous Western Australian Wheatbelt residents.

There are a number of people who have been instrumental in encouraging me to spend my time in rural areas, and I encourage other rural communities to adopt some of their strategies to assist students and encourage them to work rurally after graduating. Atherton Shire Council in Queensland provides cheap student accommodation for those undertaking course rural rotations and John Flynn Scholarship

Scheme places. Narrogin put forward a case to become one of the Rural Clinical School of Western Australia sites and has a Community Advisory Group set up to ensure the students are made to feel welcome and that the RCS continues. Community events such as Relay for Life, Rotary meetings and welcome BBQs for new residents/professional groups are a great way to introduce students and health professionals to members of the community and get them involved with some community spirit. Scholarships, no matter how much (even to attend a local conference), are a great way to attract students to rural areas because once they get there, they have an experience often very different to what they are expecting and they may then consider rural practice.

Without all the assistance I received, my country experience would not have been so wonderful and I wouldn't be so convinced I want to return to the country after graduating.

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