

Student Voice: We hear from 5th Year student, and Nathan Burton Prize winner, Isobel Wood on her elective experience in Australia.



Beach at Glenelg, Adelaide – photo Isobel Wood

For my elective I was based in a rural GP clinic and its associated hospital in the town of Murray Bridge on the outskirts of Adelaide in South Australia. With a population of around 23,000 residents, there were relatively high levels of socio-economic disadvantage and poor health compared to the surrounding Adelaide Hills area. The region was also still recovering from extreme flooding which had taken place earlier in the year, leading to ongoing physical and psychological impacts in the community. Each GP at the practice was responsible for a handful of patients in the hospital at any time, with each clinician also choosing to specialise in either anaesthetics or obstetrics.

I was impressed by the breadth of the GPs' skills and many procedures such as removal of cancerous skin lesions were done in the clinic itself, saving patients a great deal of time and money. As a result, I'm curious to explore the "GP with Extended Roles (GPwER)" framework in the UK which might allow me to tailor my training towards my own interests as well as retain and develop practical skills.

I was also interested to see how the Australian "Medicare" system works in comparison to the NHS. The fee-for-service aspect does mean that patients are more willing to contribute directly to their care and seem to have a greater understanding of the cost of treatments. However, there is some concern that this leads to over-investigation and that disadvantaged individuals are being made to take on a large proportion of these costs. For example, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community have lower incomes, poorer living conditions and a greater proportion of comorbidities than the rest of the population.

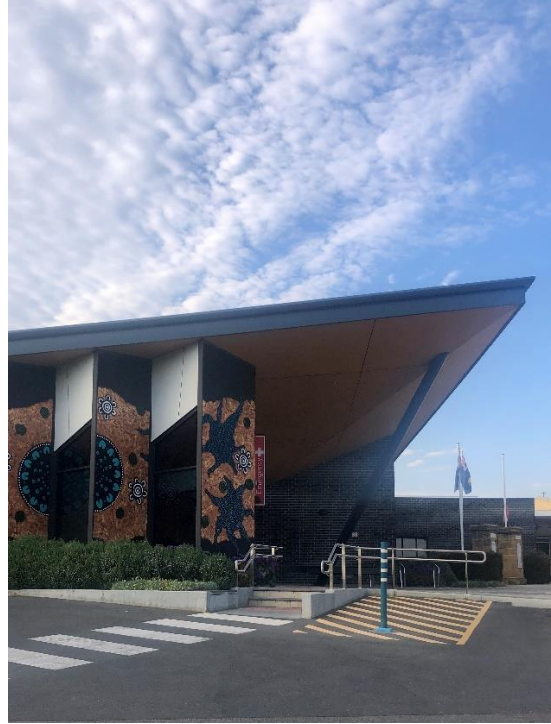
The "Closing the Gap" Initiative set up by the Government in 2008 is working to address this with additional screening programs and subsidised costs, but there remains an 8-year gap in estimated life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

It was a privilege to spend time at Moorundi Aboriginal Health Clinic in Murray Bridge and meet members of the Ngarrindjeri community as well as the doctors advocating for health equality in South Australia. Following the recent unsuccessful "Voice" referendum and rejection of the permanent inclusion of Indigenous people within the constitution, it will be interesting to observe the country's ongoing progress towards addressing these wider social determinants of health.



Bridge over River Torrens, Botanical Gardens, Adelaide

Isobel Wood



Murray Bridge Soldiers' Memorial Hospital