

ACCIDENT
+ EMERGENCY

Elective Report

Rockingham Emergency department – Rockingham,
Western Australia.

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OBJECTIVES:

1. To compare the pattern of disease and illness in Western Australia to that of the United Kingdom

I was fortunate enough to spend my elective period in a busy emergency department situated in the seaside town of Rockingham, 30 miles south west of Perth City. Rockingham has a population just shy of 13,000. With Australia being a first world country, the pattern of illness and disease was broadly the same as that seen in hospitals in the United Kingdom. Conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, hypertension and chronic lung diseases were common. The differences in disease patterns and illnesses arose as a result of the different flora and fauna, which are present in Australia. Although not a regular occurrence, there is an increased prevalence of bites from insects and snakes, such as that of the Western brown snake and the Tiger snake. Additionally, mosquito-borne viruses such as the Ross River virus which is endemic to countries such as Australia, Papua New Guinea and the south pacific, has been seen to cause a tropical disease known as Ross River Fever. It causes symptoms of a flu-like illness and arthralgia.

Another patient group that differs to those seen in the United Kingdoms health care system are the indigenous people of Australia. Their specific health concerns are different to those of the rest of the population, with high levels of alcohol and substance abuse as well as a distrust and poor compliance to that of western medicine. It became apparent that there needed to be holistic and culturally appropriate health and health related services available to the Aboriginal community.

2. To observe how the rural remote regions of Australia are supported in a health capacity

In addition to the time spent at Rockingham General hospital, I was lucky enough to spend a day at the Royal Flying Doctors Service. The service provides emergency health care to the remote regions of Australia's largest state, Western Australia. The service provides emergency health care as well

as primary care to the remote areas of the state. The service uses a helicopter emergency service assisted by aeroplanes to retrieve patients from distances beyond the coverage of the helicopters. In addition to emergency care, the service provides long distance transportation to hospitals, primary health care to remote regions lacking services, and inter-hospital transfers. The service provides care to areas of Australia who otherwise would not have had access to such medical care. During my time at the base I attended a monthly video conference, arranged between the different bases throughout the state of Western Australia. It provided me with an insight into how the services were run, as well as the difficulties encountered by the vast services. A lecture given by the director of trauma services for Perth Royal Hospital explained the vital role of the Royal Flying doctors in the care of trauma patients in the Perth area.

3. Spend time in a busy Emergency Department

During my time at Rockingham general hospital I was given the opportunity to shadow members of the health care team in order to understand further their roles in the health care system in a district general emergency department. In addition to this I was given the responsibility to take on the role of an intern in the emergency department. I clerked patients and formulated a differential diagnoses. I then presented my findings to the senior members of staff and arranged routine investigations for the patients under my care.

The health care system in Australia became apparent during my time at Rockingham. Similarly to that in the UK, the Australian healthcare service is publically funded through a system known as Medicare. However, private healthcare plays a major role in the system, with many patients having access to private services, leading to much overlap between the public and private aspects of the healthcare system.

4. Personal and professional development: to gain the confidence and skills to use my medical knowledge and skills in an emergency setting.

During my time at Rockingham general hospital I was given the opportunity to gain an insight into the differences and similarities between the health care systems in Australia and the United Kingdom. The emergency department at Rockingham general helped to reaffirm the confidence in my medical knowledge and skills before I embark upon my foundation year. My time in the emergency department exposed me to a number of conditions that are similar, if not the same, as those that I will be experiencing in my foundation year. I was given the chance to use my practical skills to help out within the department as well as participate in the discussion of patient care.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Rockingham General Hospital Emergency department. The experience has been both an educational and cultural journey, highlighting to me the differences in different healthcare systems and different patient groups. I am extremely grateful for the time and effort that the staff put into teaching and helping make my learning experience so useful.