

A new view of rural practice

To be honest, when I started Medicine at ANU this year I couldn't think of anything worse than working in a rural town. Rural medicine for me conjured up images of isolation, boredom and solitude.

I imagined finding myself in situations where I lacked the training or resources to adequately treat my patients due to the shortage of medical personnel in rural areas. I could see myself stuck out in the country; missing out on all the entertainment, social life and other exciting activities I am used to in the city. As a person who loves to spend time with others, I found the idea of being forced to work in a rural location after graduation almost unthinkable.

'... my experience in Cooma shattered my preconceived ideas of rural medicine.'

Given my feelings regarding rural medicine, I was very relieved to get a medical place which did not require four years working in the country once I graduated. In our course however, we all need to spend some time in a rural location. For me this year it meant spending a week in Cooma, a few hours south of Canberra in rural New South Wales. I wasn't overly impressed. However to my utter amazement, my experience in Cooma shattered my preconceived ideas of rural medicine.

I found the community in Cooma to be incredibly welcoming. In Cooma everyone knows everyone and the locals are very involved in their community. We met many of the local emergency and community organisations throughout the week and observed an incredibly strong community spirit. Everywhere we went people asked us how we were enjoying our rural week and our course in general. They seemed genuinely interested. We all felt very welcomed and at home. It was really refreshing.

The locals were also very willing to teach us and keen for us to learn. As medical students, we are faced with a very steep learning curve as we approach the ever increasing mountain of medical knowledge. To have our learning encouraged by the local community was very uplifting. I think I learned more in my week in Cooma than I did in any other week during the semester. The locals were even brave enough for me to



PHOTO: DEBORAH MORAN
"Prepping a line" at a mock accident scene in Cooma.

give them some flu shots. My first time giving injections! (and I really do pity my first victim... it must have hurt!) Among other things, the local people even went to great lengths to create a realistic simulation of a motor vehicle accident scene and walked us through how to respond to such a tragedy. Such an educational experience is just priceless.

My change in opinion was further strengthened by observing the contrast between city and rural GPs' work-life balance. The GPs in Cooma engage in many activities in their free time including skiing, flying planes, breeding rare goat varieties and undertaking extensive travel. Imagine spending one day a week skiing or living on a farm! I would certainly have no objections!

'We observed an incredibly strong community spirit.'

So far from being the terrible experience I envisioned, I found my rural experience in Cooma very rich and valuable. I feel I have a greater understanding of the rural lifestyle and in particular the people in the country. I look back on my rural week in Cooma with great fondness and really hope to return sometime. ☼

Deborah Moran

