

## Clinical placement

# Rural reflections

Who: **Lauren Farrugia**

Where: **PRP Bathurst, Bathurst, NSW**

Over the duration of my diagnostic radiography degree I have, so far, undertaken four different rural clinical placements; the most recent being at PRP Bathurst. I have always preferred rural clinical placement as I find them to be more personal and hands-on, and I have always had the intention to practise in a rural area on completion of my degree.

Rural and remote communities provide dynamic and unique experiences for students and offer a range of benefits and rewards. Staff in rural locations are always welcoming and willing to teach students. They provide us with various opportunities to learn and practise our radiographic skills across a range of modalities. This was especially evident through my seven-week placement at PRP Bathurst where I was provided with an invaluable learning experience, which assisted both my personal and professional development and overall growth as a diagnostic radiographer. PRP Bathurst is the sole private practice for the area and therefore has a large customer basis, making each day very busy and active. I highly enjoyed this energetic atmosphere.

At PRP I was given multiple opportunities to practise my general radiography and CT skills with minimal supervision. I really enjoyed being able to involve myself in the workflow by performing a range of different examinations. Being a fourth-year student, the staff were willing to give me every opportunity to learn and develop my confidence and abilities as a radiographer. I was given additional independence, which I greatly appreciated, and is something I find to be a component of rural placement locations. Not only was I able to further develop my radiographic skills but also my image interpretation skills. The staff at PRP motivated me to obtain a detailed clinical history in order to be able to correlate it with any potential pathologies and then to discuss these pathologies with the radiologists. For example, one patient was complaining of shoulder pain after falling over and after surveying the initial AP shoulder radiograph and subsequent radiographs a significant glenoid fracture was evident. I brought this to the attention of the other radiographers who encouraged me to discuss the findings with the radiologist. Once viewing the images, the radiologist



decided to pursue further imaging with CT to quantify the fracture and guide surgical management.

By the end of this placement I was just like one of the team, which made it very hard to say goodbye after seven weeks. I am very grateful to the staff at PRP for giving me every opportunity to develop into a capable practitioner.

I would highly recommend rural clinical placements to any health student, especially undertaking multiple rural clinical placements across the course of their degree, as each rural location is different and offers diverse benefits. Whether that be at a small rural hospital or private practice or at a large regional centre.



“My experience at Byron was truly the most unexpected six weeks – filled with memories, personal development and, most importantly, developing stronger clinical skills.”

Who: **Belinda Lim**

Where: **Byron Central Hospital, Byron Bay, NSW**

My experience at Byron was truly the most unexpected six weeks – filled with memories, personal development and, most importantly, developing stronger clinical skills.

The hospital is located away from town, and every morning I passed farms with cows grazing and dogs running around, and some of the most amazing greenery. It was the strangest sensation at first, compared to the hustle and bustle of Sydney I was more accustomed to, however in the end I came to relish being able to enjoy taking my time. It was a very different pace, which also translated to my placement supervisor's teaching style. Being my first hospital placement, learning hospital protocol and adaptation of technique was different from private practices I was used to.

Clinical histories such as 'kicked by cow', 'drill versus hand', 'hit on head by surfboard' were all a learning curve! There was always however, enough time to discuss improvements, and for them to give recommendations on my time spent there.

Mother nature was something else to contend with. Cane toads, brown snakes, carpet snakes, giant mosquitoes and ticks, things in Sydney you would learn about in a biology class I suddenly had to actively look out for! My first day at the hospital I was warned about the brown snakes near the hospital and to avoid a certain bench, needless to say I never sat on that bench! Perhaps the most iconic encounter was a bat flying into the house while my host was out!

Throughout my stay, other guests – doctors, police, emergency responders – stayed at the house, so there was never a shortage of stories to share. Weekends were always exciting – spending time with friends in Bathurst / Lismore who were also on clinical placement and exploring the area. Memories were made hiking in monsoon weather and leeches!

For those who are considering rural placement, or will be attending one soon, my best advice would be to go with an open heart and mind; you will be surprised at how much you grow.



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Who: **Sophie Frolley**

Where: **W.P. Holman Clinic, Launceston, Tas**

I was required to rank my preferences from a list of interstate placements. Having previously undertaken a rural placement, I felt my learning opportunities had far exceeded my expectations, with more opportunity for me to move around between treatment, planning and simulation at a pace which best suited my learning and addressed any learning needs.

At the Holman Clinic I felt I had the undivided attention and consistent support from the education team. I was the only student in the clinic while I was there, meaning that I did not have to share learning resources with other students. Additionally, I felt that staff members were very willing to teach me and provide feedback. The educator facilitated personalised tutorials for both CT and Philips Pinnacle treatment planning system, during which time I was able to progress at my own speed. This differed from larger group student tutorials I had participated in at other centres, where I often felt much of the time was spent explaining concepts that I already understood or brushing over topics where my understanding was lacking.

The patients were overwhelmingly accommodating and open to student participation, with only one patient opting not to have me present during their treatment. This encouraged me to relax, focus on my learning, and helped me to build rapport with the patients and get to know more about them.

I also thoroughly enjoyed the experience of living in a new city. Through the clinic I had access to great student accommodation, which was just across the road from the clinic and a short walk into the CBD. I was also able to spend a weekend hiking in Tasmania's beautiful Franklin-Gordon Rivers National Park, and hiked the Three Capes Track, which were both amazing experiences.

The extra-curricular opportunities I would have had in Tasmania were unfortunately reduced due to COVID-19 restrictions, however I was able to gain a small insight into life in a rural setting, and it was an overwhelmingly positive experience. This experience has definitely made me consider continuing my career in a rural setting, and I would highly recommend any student considering a rural placement to take the opportunity.



Who: **Yaxuan (Lisa) Peng**

Where: **Leongatha Hospital, Leongatha, Vic**

Following the completion of previous placements within metropolitan settings, the opportunity to experience a new, diverse learning environment through a rural placement caught my attention. My five-week placement at Leongatha Hospital was a truly unforgettable start to the year, allowing me to obtain professional growth along with many memorable social experiences within the local community.

My learning opportunities were maximised during this rural placement. The less hectic workplace enabled for a quicker and more comfortable adaptation to the site's protocols with further practise with my supervisor. Right from the first day I was encouraged to think more critically and holistically, through pre-patient preparation, problem solving and overcoming challenges that were present for some cases. By being allowed to take a main role in almost all X-ray examinations, I was able to see my confidence, independence and analytical skills grow as my placement progressed. It was a positive learning cycle that the more confident I was in taking control of examinations, the

more I enjoyed being a radiographer and was driven further to achieve professional growth. I was grateful that this site gave me the flexibility of working in both CT and X-ray for the entire placement. The abundance of CT practical opportunities was of great benefit in consolidating the theoretical concepts that I had been exposed to at the start of third year.

This placement also provided me with the ability to advance my communication skills. As I was more confident and relaxed in this rural environment, I was able to interact more with each patient rather than stressing about the technical side of examinations as I had been previously. Furthermore, I was encouraged to value the importance of interprofessional skills in a multidisciplinary team. As the radiologist was absent on most weekdays, I learnt to become more aware of the significant signs on images. In doing so, my ability to use medical terminology to effectively communicate urgent findings with the radiologist via a phone call greatly improved. All the allied health professionals at this hospital were very friendly and interacting with them made me feel like I was a part of the team.

Since my placement started before the COVID-19 outbreak, my social interactions with members of the community were not significantly affected. The hospital staff, which included radiographers, nurses and receptionists invited me to dinner events where I had a great time chatting with them and learning about the town. During my stay I met a fifth-year medicine student, with whom I was sharing the student accommodation with. We enjoyed trying out different types of cuisine in the town and we also had a weekly 'Wednesday movie night' after study. My social life outside the clinical workplace was filled with so much joy and happiness that it was difficult to say goodbye to all the people I met during this placement.

While living at a remote site appears daunting for some, this opportunity was a great way for me to enhance my adaptability skill and immerse myself within the local community. I was overwhelmed with many positive and supportive experiences during this rural placement, which in turn allowed my confidence and competency as a student radiographer to quickly develop. As a student, I am very grateful that I was given combined rural-urban clinical opportunities in this course. Experiencing such an amazing rural placement in third year has widened the clinical site options I want to choose after graduating.