

President's Prize 2012- Report

Jabiru Community Health Centre, January 2013

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Want to know the best way to start the New Year!? With a cleansing sweat... induced by the Darwin wet season! That is what, this little Victorian did January 1st, 2013!

Welcome to the Northern Territory, my President's Prize placement and the magnificence of the following 2 weeks in Jabiru, Kakadu. The beauty of this experience is the ability to choose where ever you want to go in rural or remote Australia. It became apparent to me just how removed Jabiru was as we belted along the Arnhem Hwy in to Kakadu National Park at the set speed limit of 130km! I had chosen Jabiru, as the variation of services that the clinic offers appealed to me. The township and the wider community it services has a population of about 1500 people. The Community Health Centre has a mixture of people accessing services and resources including the local people and workers of the Ranger Mine (14km from Jabiru).



Figure 1: Jabiru



Figure 2: Bus Station

A day in Jabiru started in the clinic at 8am, after riding my borrowed bike a whole 2 minutes from one side of town to the centre. I still managed to work up a sweat in this time no matter how slowly I took it! Depending on the day, there would be a staff meeting for an hour or otherwise we were straight into seeing patients. What I liked most about this placement was that it was up to me to make the most of my learning experience. I would latch on to any of the willing doctors and nurses who wanted to teach. The staff at the clinic made my time there so enjoyable and fruitful as everyone was keen to teach and get me involved. By day two I was taking bloods, taking patient histories, undertaking examinations that I deemed appropriate under the watchful eye of who ever was happy to have me do so.



Figure 3: Waiting Room



Figure 4: Treatment Room

The pace of the clinic was determined by the amount of drop in patients, it varied every day. Those that dropped in to the clinic saw the nurses and if necessary were followed up by one of the GPs. However, regardless of the patient load, there was always time to head home for lunch (mind you there is always a nurse on-call over the lunch hour, care of patients is never compromised). I guess this is the beauty of living and working in such a small town.

Afternoons, took much the same structure as the morning. Being a student I had the benefit of flowing patients through their journey in the clinic. I often saw a patient, with the nurse, who had dropped in and then followed up with the doctor. This allowed me to have “bedside” tutorials with each of the health professionals that the patient saw. I found this learning so rewarding, it makes learning a condition or concept so much more understandable when you can see the effect that it has on a patient.

After the clinic was done for the day there was plenty of time and beautiful sunshine to enjoy before the sun went down. Jabiru, although small, has a lovely lake to walk, run or bike around. I often headed to the local 50m swimming pool, there is something very luxurious about chucking laps in an Olympic size swimming pool by yourself! Certainly do not get to do that in the hustle and bustle of the city where there are 4 or more people in a lane! On the odd occasion there would be another swimmer doing the same, and this was a great opportunity to have a chat and meet some locals. Everyone is so friendly and approachable in Jabiru!



Figure 5: Jabiru Lake



Figure 6: Local Pool

So this was supposedly the wet season, however, 2013 has not seen much rain. The thunderstorms would roll over town with the occasional downpour in the afternoon (often just as I was about to ride home from clinic). The storms were magnificent – lighting up the night sky and the faint grumble of thunder in the distance lulled me to sleep.

I only had two wheels to get around on, powered by me, and most of the sights in Kakadu are about 50km from anywhere. In 37 degree heat I was not too keen on cycling everywhere. That being said, I did hear that German tourist in town at the same time as I was, was doing exactly that! Most of the staff that work at the clinic would either head back to Darwin for the weekend or be on call. So Jabiru was pretty quiet on weekends. I was lucky enough to go on an afternoon walk with one of the GPs and her husband one Saturday afternoon. We headed off to Gubara, where we walked through woodlands to get to beautiful and shady monsoon forest pools. As we were walking in past the sandstone cliffs, a storm poured down on us, horizontal rain, we were drenched right through! This was quite a relief from the heat of the day and none of us were phased by this one bit! Once we were at the pools we had a bit of a splash and explore around, seeing some amazing wildlife. By the time we got back to the car a few hours later, we were dry as a chip, you would not have known a storm had passed through.



Figure 7: Top of Gubara Pools



Figure 8: On the walk into Gubara

By the time the second weekend rolled around, another student on the John Flynn program had arrived. We had spent a week together at the clinic and thought it a good idea to hire a car and see some sights for ourselves in the wonder that is Kakadu. We ticked a few things off our bucket lists – Sunset at Ubirr, crocodile spotting at Cahill's Crossing (none to be seen that afternoon) and a magnificent dawn cruise on Yellow Water wetlands (where we spotted a plethora of crocs). We climbed up every lookout we could get too, and sought relief from the heat in a local swimming hole slightly off the beaten track. Our day was jam-packed and full of amazing wildlife and scenery!



Figure 9: Cahill's Crossing into Arnhem Land



Figure 10: Stormy sundown at Ubirr



Figure 11: Good Morning Yellow Waters



Figure 12: Rockhole Swimming

I was sad to be leaving the clinic, from the moment I walked in I felt welcomed and encouraged to participate in anything. My experience was so positive where I learnt and practiced new skills. I observed some amazing doctor-patient interactions where the most simple consultations unraveled to reveal extremely complex and confronting situations. I felt privileged to see how these issues were addressed so delicately whilst empowering the patient at the centre of it all.

This is not the first time I have been to the NT, it will not be my last, there is something about the territory that draws you back. I feel like that every time I go there, I leave a little bit of myself behind as an excuse to have to go back. I think what is more likely is that I grow into a better person and going back will actually make me a well-rounded doctor in the future.

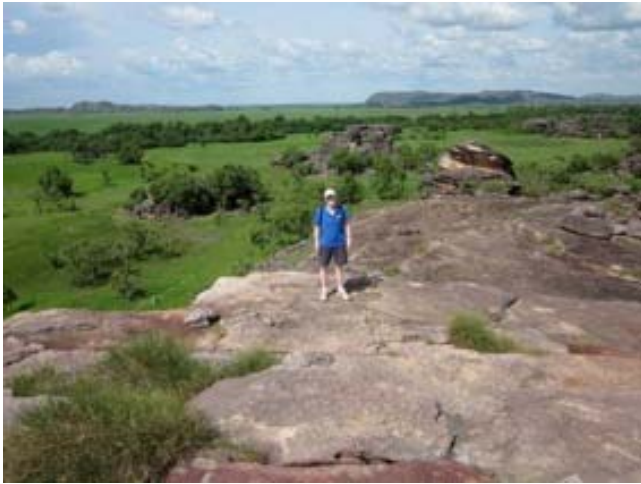


Figure 13: An Afternoon at Ubirr



Figure 14: Home Billabong, Cooinda