

2018 NAFEA Scholarship Recipient – Monique Took

This year I completed a five week rural physiotherapy rotation in Townsville, North Queensland. This placement involved inpatient physiotherapy services within an acute stroke and neurological ward at the Townsville Hospital. Being the only tertiary hospital in North Queensland, it supports a catchment population of approximately 695, 000 people across many rural and remote towns. This resulted in a higher patient caseload, especially within an acute setting, with a wide range of neurological complexities and patient demographics.

Out of all my rotations within my final year of physiotherapy this placement was the most challenging, however provided the most professional growth and development. The fast patient discharge rate from the acute ward as well as the range of conditions and patient presentations meant that I was constantly learning and developing my physiotherapy skills right up until the last day. This placement significantly developed my ability to work within a multidisciplinary team in a busy hospital setting and allowed me to be actively involved in the decision-making process of my patients in team meetings. Additionally, this rural experience meant that I was the only student physiotherapist supervised by my clinical educator which enabled me to have responsibility for a larger number of patients and provided accelerated learning opportunities with my educator.

In comparison to Brisbane hospitals, I was grateful to experience a more culturally diverse patient caseload including a large number of patients from Aboriginal and Indigenous backgrounds. As a physiotherapist, rapport building with patients is imperative for effective intervention and this became even more essential when communicating with the variety of patients from North Queensland. I gained appreciation of the stories and challenges that are faced by patients from Indigenous and rural communities whilst also developing my clinical communication skills, cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Placement in Townsville offered a great work life balance. I relished in the slower lifestyle of the city where traffic was non-existent, the produce was local and fresh, and the community was always friendly and accommodating. During my placement there was never a weekend without some form of community event whether it was pop-up food trucks, night markets, cultural festivals or bigger events like the Townsville Show or the V8 Supercars in the Townsville 400. If I wasn't at one of these events, I would spend my weekends exploring Magnetic Island, sitting by the waterfront of the Strand, climbing Castle Hill or hiking to natural landmarks and waterfalls just outside of Townsville. I loved my experience within the hospital and the community of Townsville that it helped facilitate my decision to apply for future physiotherapy graduate positions in Townsville and other rural community hospitals in addition to Brisbane.

Partaking in this rural placement allowed me to develop my clinical knowledge and skills at an accelerated rate through the many challenges and learning opportunities associated with rural health. I would highly recommend future students to participate in a rural placement. It's a chance to step out of your comfort zone, explore somewhere new, develop great relationships and widen your clinical knowledge beyond what is experienced in metropolitan healthcare.

I am truly thankful to the NAFEA for providing financial assistance to support my relocation for the five weeks of placement. It is through their support that I was able to fully immerse myself in the community of Townsville without being financially stressed. I hope that my amazing experience during my rural placement and the significant impact the NAFEA had in supporting this endeavour will help promote this experience for future applicants.