

Student report

Anna Ingram¹

¹Monash University

The 12th National Rural Health Conference was my first conference I'd ever attended.

I've always been really interested in rural health, and wanted to work rurally, but aside from my local rural health club, not done much about it. I knew, as anyone coming from a rural area does, the sort of issues rural health faces, but nothing compared to what I have learnt in the past 3 days.

And it hasn't just been learning of the issues, but learning to change how I've thought about rural health problems. Like one of the presenters at the conference said, we often spend 80% of our time thinking about the problems, 20% about the solutions, whereas it should be the opposite way. And I totally agree!

All of the speakers at the plenary sessions taught me something about rural health, whether I had expected to learn or not. Some of favourite speakers included Tom Calma, Louise Sylvan, Andrew Laming and Jane Hall.

Hearing about the indigenous tobacco use issues faced in rural and remote areas, which Tom spoke about was in particular eye opening for me. In regards to substance abuse and indigenous health issues, I have really only heard about the need to limit/lower alcohol intake; so to hear Tom speak was fascinating- he spoke in such a down to earth, natural way that his points were clear, and obvious.

Louise Sylvan spoke after Tom, and the statistics she gave were very startling. Of course I was aware how much of a problem obesity is in Australia, but of the difference between rural areas and metro, with rural areas having a higher percentage of obese people- that shocked me.

Andrew Laming motivated me- his impressive resume, and the passionate way he spoke about changing access to be highly equitable to patients in rural and remote areas was amazing.

In the concurrent sessions I was moved by Trish Eerden's talk about her personal life and her child, and I was excited by the prospect of the national disability insurance scheme- disability in rural areas is a topic of high interest to me as my youngest sister is disabled, so to hear so many passionate people wanting to make a difference in the health care issues that surround this group was very moving.

The conference dinner was definitely a highlight- it was a fantastic night and I was given the opportunity to talk with so many different people from so many different backgrounds, whether it be allied health, teaching, or other students. It was also comforting to hear that health professionals across all fields, from OTs and physios to specialists and social workers, all suffered similar issues by working in rural areas, and that perhaps by pooling resources it could be overcome.

I also was very happy to meet the RAMUS team at the RAMUS lunch- it was lovely to put a name to the faces of the people that make it possible for me to have such a fantastic scholarship.

Going back to university, and to the hospital and rural community in which I am placed for the remainder of the year, I have a fresher and better understanding on the needs of the patients I will be seeing; in particular, the patients who have travelled far to see the specialists and GP's with whom I will be sitting in with. I believe having this better understanding will enable me to help give better patient care.

Overall, I have had a fantastic conference, especially for my first time. I am so motivated to make a difference to rural and remote health care- more motivated than ever to practice rurally. I feel that by wanting to live rurally, and practicing rurally, there is an opportunity for me to give back to communities in a way that gives them exactly what they need.

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to see and learn all that I have; I feel very privileged!