

# AMSF Travel Scholarship Report

**Recipient: Michael Weightman**

**Destination: United States of America**



**ADELAIDE MEDICAL  
STUDENTS' FOUNDATION**

The opportunity to travel to Boston and undertake a clinical placement at McLean Hospital – Harvard University's largest psychiatric facility – has been a highlight of my medical student career and a fantastic learning experience. I have had an interest in psychiatry as a specialty for a while now and jumped at the chance to come to one of the world's most renowned clinical and academic mental health centres. I feel very fortunate to have undertaken an elective such as this and am most grateful for the funding from the Adelaide Medical Students' Foundation. The only time I could get over to Boston was in the bitter cold of January, but this mattered little as I was treated to an amazing month in the so-called "Athens of America."

The hospital itself was a pretty impressive place. It was situated on top of Waverley Oaks Hill in Belmont, Massachusetts on a beautiful and spacious campus that was chosen by Frederick Law Olmsted – the famous landscape architect who designed Central Park on Manhattan. The day I arrived it was covered in snow and it looked gorgeous. Although I got lost immediately, this gave me ample opportunity to explore the grounds and trace the footsteps of McLean's many famous former patients, such as Ray Charles, Sylvia Plath and John Nash. Once I finally found the correct department to report to, I met the two local Harvard medical students with whom I was rostered on, who were both very friendly and helped me settle into American medical student life with ease.



I was attached to the AB2 ward at McLean, which primarily cared for patients with psychotic and bipolar disorders. This meant for a varied and interesting clinical experience, as I was directly involved in the

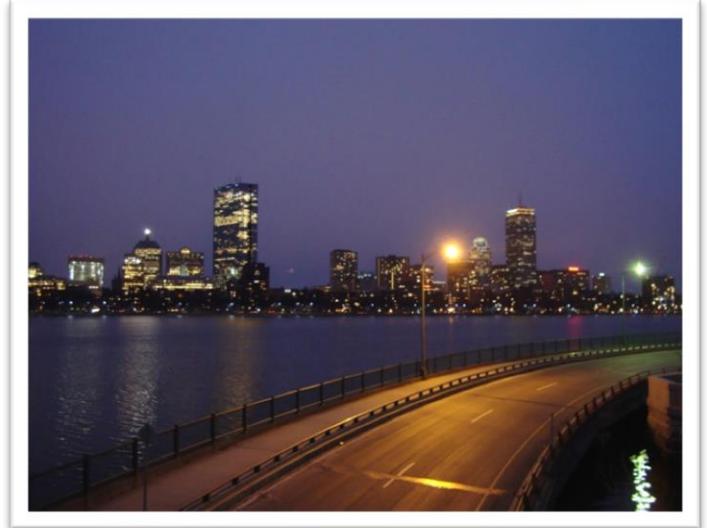
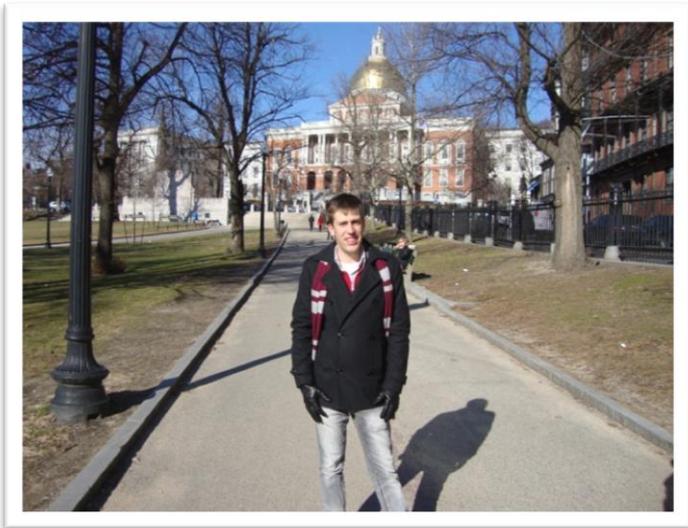
treatment of many severely ill patients. This was a great learning experience that enabled me to improve my skills both at developing therapeutic relationships with patients and proposing management plans with the treating team. I enjoyed the responsibility to clerk several patients each day on the ward, follow their progress and facilitate their return to the community. It was greatly satisfying to help get people's lives back on track.

The teaching programme here was excellent too, with almost a dozen tutes a week from a wide variety of clinical staff from the Harvard Medical School. I learnt from many experts who demonstrated different psychopathology and psychotherapy techniques – with the highlight being Dr Terry Maltzberger in action employing Freudian free association techniques on a patient! Additionally, attending Grand Round was a great opportunity to learn about the latest research being undertaken at the hospital, which receives an unbelievable amount of funding – the scale of the different research projects was most impressive. Another drawcard of McLean is that it is home to both the largest brain bank and psychiatric imaging facility in the world. It was fascinating to get a tour and have a glimpse into some of the research going in these areas. My time at the hospital was a wonderful learning experience.



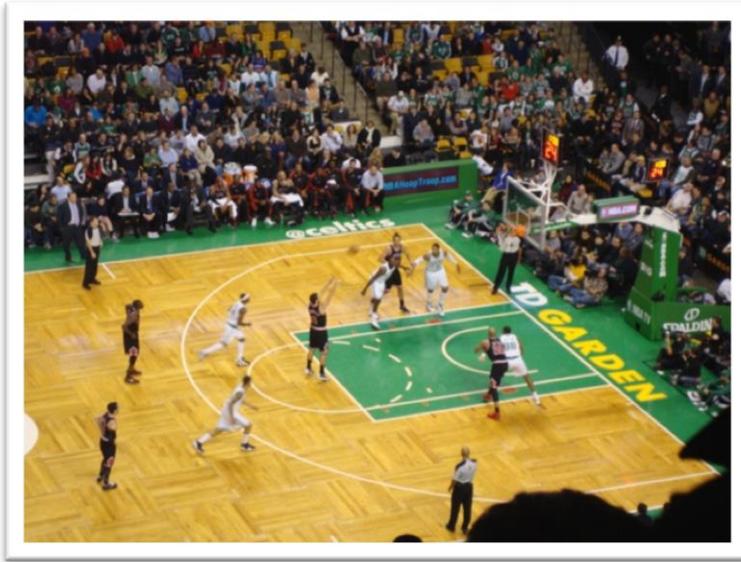
In coming to McLean, I was also interested to see how the US health system operates, particularly because it has such a bad reputation back in Australia. It was pleasing to discover that McLean was required to meet a minimum *pro bono* treatment quota and had a fund to pay for uninsured patients, so it would be extremely rare for a patient to be turned away. Patients with mental illness are among the most vulnerable in society and large proportion of the patients that I saw came from a lower socio-economic background. In these groups, a lack of health insurance was not usually a barrier to receiving acute care in the hospital, but was

problematic on discharge as uninsured patients were not able to enter the partial programmes that they were suited for, or were unable to afford follow-up specialist appointments or ongoing treatment. This is to some extent comparable to Australia, where many public patients are unable to afford private services and non-Medicare patients find access full-price medication out of reach. The American system is perhaps more inequitable though, as a higher percentage of patients miss out while those with maximum insurance get a first class array of extra services and benefits.



During my stay at McLean I lived in a student apartment in nearby Cambridge, which was just a train, subway or bus ride away from both the hospital and city centre. Cambridge was a great area to be based, as it was close to the Harvard campus and a popular location among local students for accommodation and entertainment. Boston is a very liveable city and I was particularly impressed with the public transport, which was reliable and ran continuously, making a very pleasant change from back in Adelaide.

Outside of my time at the hospital, I also got the chance to experience the sights of Boston and parts of north-eastern USA. Boston was a very interesting place, with much of America's early history occurring in the area. The major sites of historical interest were linked on the Freedom Trail, which was a long red line painted along the footpaths that you walked down to reach various curiosities. I now have a much deeper appreciation of America's history, even if much of it seems overly jingoistic and unnecessarily violent! I also enjoyed the chance to experience live American sport, watching the both the Celtics and Bruins play at the TD Garden. Broadway in Boston provided an excellent source of entertainment, as did the Museum of Fine Art. The much smaller Museum of Bad Art was less auspicious but equally enjoyable.



My time in Boston was an amazing experience and I feel very privileged to have had this opportunity. I would like to thank the Adelaide Medical Students' Foundation for helping to make this elective possible and would recommend for any medical student thinking of doing a term overseas to go for it!