

No cold packs required

Mawson Station is on the coast of Mac Robertson Land and close to the Framnes Mountains. This location presents many dangers to expeditioners. Apart from the obvious cold there are crevasses, mountains, ice cliffs and cold water. We are all enticed by these wonders to roam around the environs with cameras blazing, at times quite oblivious to the dangers. Fortunately we are all carefully trained to look after ourselves and each other before we venture into this unique environment.

What is it like living and working in Antarctica as a doctor? I asked myself this question about a year ago, while looking at an advertisement in a medical magazine during a lunch break in the surgery. I have now been at Mawson Station for the past four months, finding out first hand what it is really like and learning more every day. I can gladly report that to date there have been no significant medical emergencies to deal with, as now there are only 20 of us left to winter over here for the next eight months it should remain quiet on the medical front.

I probably see myself as a fellow expeditioner, itinerant labourer, photographer, and of course, finally a doctor if needed. The station is extremely well equipped medically and complemented with a group of very willing anaesthetic and theatre assistants if required, namely the chef, plumber, carpenter, biologist and the meteorologist.

After being urgently called to see a young man who had stumbled and sprained his ankle badly, I was asked if he would benefit from a cold pack

immediately; to which I replied 'no', while removing his shoe and sock in -5°C ! I am still not sure if it was 16 years of country general practice or two months in Antarctica that made me resist the ice pack first aid measure.

If my wife allowed it, I would certainly love to return to this continent, which is probably one of the most unique and isolated environments on earth; it certainly is a privilege. A good friend and colleague of mine was continually asked why he wanted to go to Antarctica and he answered quietly, that if they had to ask why, then it was unlikely the answer would be understood.

Australia maintains stations at Casey, Davis, Mawson and Macquarie Island.

The only drawback to this adventure will be returning to routine medical work back home; certainly country locums look the most attractive so far.

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