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Exploring the learning trajectory in general practice clinical placements: From observation to autonomous practice

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Learning in clinical placements is opportunistic. It would be useful to be able to describe the range of patient encounters and what advantages and challenges these consultations present to students entering the clinical workplace and gaining relevant knowledge and skills in dealing with patients in authentic healthcare settings across the academic year.

The aim of this study was to chart the learning trajectory of students placed within general practices across three disparate regional areas within Gippsland in Victoria.
An electronic logbook was developed for students to record non-identifying details of their patient encounters within their year-long placements in general practices. The logbook can be accessed from any internet-aware device. The design of the logbook was based on the BEACH template, and the data entry process follows a workflow model and takes less than a minute per patient encounter.

The logbook data to date indicate that students have embraced the electronic logbook to record their learning opportunities within general practice placements. The trajectory of learning extends from initial observation of GP supervisors interacting with patients through to the core tasks underpinning effective patient consultations.

The electronic logbook appears to support the activities of learning of the current generation of medical students. It would be useful to encourage the students to use this tool across other clinical placements to infer matches between learning in the workplace and the formal curriculum, and to explore how theory and practice intersect across the clinical years in undergraduate medicine.