

Embracing The Past – Part 18  
The 70's, Country Hospitals 2

It was understandable that when a funded staff position was vacant, it would be used for a different category of staff for which a need was established. It was difficult if the handcraft worker was a reliable local who would not appreciate being stood down every time a short term travelling OT turned up. The Cairns solution to employ each on a part time basis was not ideal either. For both Rockhampton and Cairns, handcraft positions were created in their own right, thus leaving the OT positions free to be filled when a therapist became available. As hospitals developed Psychiatric and Geriatric Units, these handcraft positions were reclassified as Recreation Officers to provide the wide range of activities then required.

To encourage therapists to fill the less popular or remote positions, Public Service Scholarships were introduced. Although the Public Service Board was gradually phasing out the scheme it was realized there was a special need for occupational therapists and the scheme was continued for a few years. The student was bonded to go where directed by the Department of Health for a period equal to the period for which the scholarship was awarded but with a minimum of two years. Of the five scholarship holders who graduated in 1974, four went to the Division of Psychiatric Services and one went to the Rockhampton Hospital. Unfortunately there were not to be any scholarship holders graduating in 1975 or 1976 but it was hoped to have some in 1977 and 1978 as nine scholarships were offered in 1975.

By the middle of 1975 both Bundaberg and Ipswich Hospitals had completed their first year of providing an occupational therapy service and Mt Isa and Toowoomba Hospitals were about to start. Mackay and Maryborough had been unable to recruit staff and Rockhampton had been unable to maintain continuity of service. The Townsville Hospital Occupational Therapy Department was well developed but there was a high turnover of staff. Cairns was about to get a second position with a prospect of some stability as a local therapist who had spent many years raising a family wished to return to the workforce. At that time there was no refresher course available but there was the ability through the National Employment and Training Scheme to be provided with literature from an approved list if supported by a mentor. She also made a point of visiting facilities in Brisbane.

A further attempt to obtain staff was to take advantage of recruitment from Britain through the Assisted Migrant Scheme, as Occupational Therapy was considered an "Eligible Profession." An advertisement was to be placed in the British Journal of Occupational Therapy to be published 15<sup>th</sup> February 1976. We had contact with a local OT through the Industrials Promotion Officer, Queensland House in London and she was to sit on interviews. I think the State Migration Office sent the information by surface mail and it missed the deadline!