

## Embracing The Past – Part 19 The 70's, Country Hospitals 3

In the mid 70's, as mentioned in Part 18, we were attempting to recruit therapists from overseas. There was surprise around Australia when there was a sudden influx of applications from Indian trained occupational therapists, particularly in Victoria. There was concern because it was known that some of the Indian Training Schools were not approved by the World Federation of Occupational Therapists. We wondered what was the motivation behind some of the applications.

Fortunately Lillian Wieckhorst, one of the original five Diplomates, as President of the Australian Association of Occupational Therapists, attended the Sixth International Congress of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists in Vancouver, Canada. There she spoke to several Senior Therapists who had worked in India and provided the following recommendations:

1. That the graduate should have at least two years clinical practice in his/her own country before leaving for overseas (this should also apply to our own therapists).
2. That the prospective employer should obtain a letter from the Indian Association of Occupational Therapists stating that the therapist has been in good standing with the Association for at least two years and that the training institution is on the WFOT approved list.
3. That the Indian therapist should not be placed in a sole position but with other local therapists and Religious/cultural issues be considered.

Some of the reasons for the applications could have been that popular city positions in India were hard to come by, that Australian salaries were more attractive (?), that Australian citizenship could lead to entry to Britain and they did not want to go to their own remote areas where there was also a great need for therapists.

By the middle of 1976 the position of Adviser in Occupational Therapy had been officially created and Ruth Read appointed; the University Degree Course had been extended to seven semesters; a Degree with Honours could now be taken and a Masters Course was one of the few new courses offered by the University that year.

Things were beginning to happen in the small country hospitals. Therapists living in the area where no OT positions existed were tempted to take part-time assistants-in-nursing or similar positions and could not resist (illegally) making use of their OT skills. Many of the country hospitals had a Ward or Annexe that was really the local town nursing home.

After some negotiation, Roma Hospital was allocated three four-hour sessions a week and Warwick Hospital four three-hour sessions to assess the need in small country hospitals for occupational therapy services, to assess the nursing home patients and to help develop activity programmes to be run by volunteers. Being the health service for the district it was soon realised that a group in need of occupational therapy services were children with a variety of perceptual/motor or behaviour problems who could attend as outpatients. By the following year (1977) the Warwick hours had been extended to sixteen.