

Embracing The Past-Part 20 The 70's, Country Hospitals 4

The end of the decade was approaching. Although the Government was having financial problems, the Hospitals were not as badly affected as Health Department services such as the Division of Community Medicine. Probably the long established Hospitals could more easily find a redundant position to swap, particularly if it was for only a few hours. Soon there was permission to provide ten hours of occupational therapy service shared between the Ayre and Home Hill Hospitals. The therapist appointed happened to be Judith Ford (nee Crellin) who was one of the original five Diplomates. It was unfortunate that Ipswich Hospital, after having a therapist for two years from 1974 was then without one until 1981 due to the refurbishment building programme.

At that time, a decision had been made, that the Department of Health was to be responsible for the assessment and treatment of young school children with perceptual/motor, behaviour and other problems. The Division of Community Medicine was establishing small centres all around the State staffed with Community Health Nurses who had support from regional School Health Medical Officers.

Relying on married occupational therapist willing to work part time was a hit and miss approach to providing services in the country. It began to be realised that a better way to make full use of a scarce, but important resource in the community, was to create a full time position at the Hospital. That therapist was then expected to also provide services to the children at school, possibly as outpatients; work with clients referred by the Community Health Services Centre and make regular consultative visits to all the Hospitals and Institutions under that particular Hospitals Board. It was noted that a full time occupational therapy position was required for a primary school population of 2,500. It was not long before the part time position at Roma was increased to full time with a requirement to cover Mitchell, Injune and Surat.

With the increasing number of students graduating there was a better chance of filling country positions, particularly as students could now have some country clinical experience. In September 1977, Cairns, Townsville, Mt Isa, and Rockhampton Hospitals Boards received Ministerial Approval for occupational therapy students to undertake clinical placements

Maryborough and Mackay had at last obtained staff. A full time position to be shared between Mareeba, Herberton and Atherton Hospitals was created. Part time positions were provided at Barcaldine and Innisfail but the request for Hospitals under the Banana Board lapsed due to lack of funds. A therapist was about to be appointed to the brand new Department at the Redcliffe Hospital and another was to commence at the Gold Coast Hospital, Southport.

A Bill to introduce the Occupational Therapists Act 1979 passed its final Reading in the Queensland Parliament on 31st October 1979. In the next decade therapists would be required to be Registered. This was particularly important as therapists moved into community programmes and Private Practice where the community needed to have confidence in professional standards.

The end of an era came when the Association farewelled Jennifer Line, in February 1979. She had been very supportive of the students having a community orientation in their work.