



Global drive for speech pathologists

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A SERIOUS shortage of speech pathologists has forced Cairns Base Hospital to recruit internationally for positions that have remained unfilled despite several rounds of advertising.

The campaign is aimed at the UK and New Zealand, with advertisements enticing speech pathologists to enjoy the tropical Cairns lifestyle.

Four out of seven speech pathologist positions at the hospital are vacant, including the director of speech pathology position, which has been unfilled since February.

Cairns and Hinterland Health spokeswoman Linda Bailey said the problem was widespread and the hospital was now recruiting overseas.

"There is a serious shortage of speech pathologists not just in Queensland but across

Australia in both the public and private sector, and recruitment has proven very difficult for vacant positions, with the hospital having already undertaken several rounds of advertising," she said.

Dr Wendy Pearce says nearly a quarter of parents in rural areas had genuine concerns about their children's speech development.

The James Cook University senior lecturer said Far Northerners waited up to 18 months to see a pathologist.

"The more rural or remote, often less frequent the service. Many parents get frustrated because they can't find the help they want," Dr Pearce said.

She said early intervention was crucial because children with speech problems were likely to fall behind at school.

"If they don't have

those kind of elementary skills when they start school they're often the ones with difficulties learning to read and write."

Cairns speech pathologist Wendy Richardson said poor pay and "burn out", particularly at schools, contributed to the shortage.

"The system is not working well," Ms Richardson said.

Sarah Grainer, whose daughter, Sandra Eustice, was diagnosed with a speech disorder three years ago, agreed there was "very limited support" for children with speech issues.

Education Queensland regional director Clive Dixon said there were nearly 10 full-time equivalent speech pathologists providing support to 1276 students across the region.

A position at Thursday Island is vacant despite being advertised a number of times.