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Statistical Note

WELCOME PROGRESS IN DEVELOPMENT OF MEDICAL EDUCATION FACILITIES

Cairns based regional business economist, Bill Cummings. has welcomed the commencement of James Cook University medical teaching facilities on the Sheridan Street site adjacent to the Cairns Hospital.

The Cairns Tropical (Far) North Queensland region has recorded the highest population growth in northern Australia in recent decades. With a residential population topping 300,000, it is now the largest in population in the northern Australia. However, the level of hospital development and university medical teaching facilities have lagged behind other major northern regions.

When the decision was made about 2007 to continue developing the Cairns Base Hospital on the Esplanade site, it became obvious that the largely undeveloped block of land on Sheridan Street where the large statue of Captain Cook was located, represented a major opportunity to progress the development of hospital and medical education facilities in the Cairns region. University medical teaching facilities need to be located next to a major hospital. For instance, the Queensland University (UQ) Medical School is located at Herston in Brisbane adjacent to the Brisbane General Hospital rather than at the UQ's main Saint Lucia Campus. JCU's main Cairns Campus is also located well out of the Cairns City Centre away from the Hospital.

At the time, with the assistance of my daughter Emma Thirkell, who has extensive experience in real estate and land valuation, we contacted the owners of the parcels of land in that city block and introduced the prospect of the various allotments being purchased and amalgamated into a suitable site for a university medical school facilities and hospital expansion. We were encouraged by positive responses.

One of the attractive features of the site was the fact that the major hospital carpark had been located on the block between the Sheridan Street site and the Cairns Hospital site and connected with an overhead walkway. This meant that a covered overhead walkway could be developed connecting the Sheridan Street site with the main hospital via the car park.

At the time, we presented the proposal to the Vice Chancellor, James Cook University, and also to the Department of Health and the Cairns Hospital Administration.

We are delighted to see the recent progress that has been made towards realising the opportunity. We congratulate those involved and look forward to the full realisation of the potential for a strong medical school to develop on the site as part of Cairns Hospital achieving university 'Top Tier' hospital status.