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| Article: | Intern case 'no comparison to Jayant Patel' |
| Date: | 10 April 2007 |
| Source: | The Australian (Roberta Mancuso) |

THE Queensland Government denies it has another Jayant Patel scandal on its hands amid an investigation into how four foreign interns were hired at a regional hospital without background checks.

Health Minister Stephen Robertson today threatened senior staff at Cairns Base Hospital with the sack over the hiring in January of four medical graduates on \$61,352 annual salary packages without properly screening their qualifications, including English competency.

One graduate has since been sacked and one has been registered while the other two are still suspended without pay until they are fit to be registered.

One intern had reportedly used a public health qualification from a Shanghai college to pass herself off as a clinically trained junior doctor in her final year of training.

Another is believed to have clinical training but lacked sufficient English skills.

The credentials of the group were not checked by the hospital or regulatory managers before they were hired - only 18 months after the scandal of Indian-trained surgeon Jayant Patel.

Patel, who fled to the US in 2005, is linked to the deaths of at least 17 patients at Bundaberg Base Hospital.

The status of the Cairns interns was discovered in February when hospital bosses were reminded to ensure their staff were properly vetted and registered.

Mr Robertson today would not draw comparisons to the scandal involving Patel, who falsified his application for registration in Queensland, hiding the fact he had been found guilty of gross negligence in the US.

Neither the Medical Board nor Queensland Health checked his background before he became Bundaberg hospital's director of surgery.

"This is regrettable but represents a situation just in Cairns, not a system flaw," Mr Robertson said.

"This is not a repeat of the Patel tragedy in Bundaberg. These are student interns who were not performing surgery or indeed any medical procedures."

Interns employed through recruitment agency

He said the four were employed as observers at the far north Queensland hospital through a recruitment agency because four other interns had dropped out.



Mr Robertson said those who hired them could face dismissal, while the recruitment agency would also be investigated.

"There is now a full investigation under way to determine exactly what happened that led to these four individuals being employed as observers," he said.

"Any recommendation that comes out of that investigation will of course be acted upon ... I expect right up to the point of dismissal, but that is dependent on the facts that get revealed through this inquiry."

Mr Robertson said the Government had carried out a review of all interns employed in Queensland after the Cairns incident, but found no similar cases.

The incident comes despite a raft of recommendations following two inquiries, sparked by Patel, which called for better checks on foreign-trained doctors.

Opposition Leader Jeff Seeney said Queenslanders could not have faith in the public health system.

"The health system is still not working to the extent the people of Queensland can have confidence," he said.