

Editorials

Masterful Master Plan

A special state committee has come up with a truly admirable plan designed to improve dramatically the care and treatment of the mentally ill and retarded.

The New York State Planning Committee on mental disorders has advanced hundreds of recommendations that would expand care and treatment by 40 per cent in the next 10 years. The master plan, in the works for more than two years, represents the efforts of more than 800 mental health authorities and private citizens.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the plan is the emphasis on decentralization of treatment facilities. Instead of more and more huge, monolithic institutions, there are to be community centers designed to treat as many as possible as out-patients.

There are to be 150 community mental health centers to be administered by county or regional boards and some 30, easily accessible, community mental retardation centers.

And there was more, much more—on financing, on the training of new personnel, on insurance, on hospitals for mentally retarded children—that make much sense.

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STATEN ISLAND is particularly sensitive to the possible results of this study. It is the home of the Willowbrook State School, now under fire from some quarters, and it is the site of a huge new mental institution to be built at Ocean Breeze.

But Staten Islanders are also aware that money is a prime factor in the implementation of such plans. Willowbrook's plight is largely the result of insufficient funds. The eventual building of the Ocean Breeze institution, planned for years, is directly dependent upon the availability of cold cash.

Complicating the report still further is the discordant intrusion of partisan politics on the scene. The charges and counter-charges that preceded and followed the issuance of the study are unfortunate.

True, political contention can sometimes speed things along. But treatment of the mentally ill has been neglected much too long already and it certainly should not be used as just another means of making political hay.

The treatment of the mentally retarded is one of the great health problems of our time. It is one issue on which both political parties should agree as to the need and then agree as to a plan.