

# Federal funds for Willowbrook in jeopardy

By JANE KURTIN

Along with a dozen New York State nursing homes and other mental institutions, Willowbrook State School faces the loss of the federal portion of its funding as of Dec. 31.

About 3,500 patients — those who require special attention because they cannot help themselves — will lose Medicaid reimbursements because state institutions have not met federal health standards.

Although the institution has functioned despite a devastating budget cut to the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene, this final blow dealt by the federal government, inspections of state operations at Willowbrook nearly impossible.

"Patient care here will deteriorate even farther," said Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook, "and I don't know how we can continue to operate even at this poor level."

"Things will not improve," continued Dr. Hammond. "Health standards will go lower, and I can't see how New York State will come up with the funds which were previously provided federally."

"We have known for some time that we faced the loss of Medicaid. We'd been told quite some time ago that the institution would not receive temporary approvals beyond Dec. 31."

Guidelines used by the federal government for determination

of which operations meet health standards, are those set by New York State for its own institutions.

While the State must permit institutions like Willowbrook to operate far below approved health criterion because of the demand for bed space, the State also continues to flunk these institutions after they're examined by teams of inspectors.

There is no punishment meted out by the state Health Department to the deficient institutions, but in the words of one administrator "it is hoped that the threat of loss of federal funds serves as an incentive."

Clearly even the most vigorous incentive at

Willowbrook State School would not compensate for a critical staff shortage and desperately overcrowded wards.

"Medicaid standards," explained Dr. Hammond, "call for no more than four patients in a room."

At Willowbrook, 60 and often more patients are cramped into

day wards and then sleep in rooms which are wall to wall hospital beds.

"For the kind of health standards by Medicaid," said Dr. Hammond, "We would have to tear the institution down and construct entirely new facilities."

Already, the time allotted for an attendant to feed a helpless patient is about three minutes. It is the patient who cannot walk, feed himself, who requires diaper changing, who will suffer most from the Dec. 31 end to federal financing.

Elmer W. Smith, regional director of the Health Education and Welfare social and rehabilitation service admitted that "under the present fiscal crunch, we know the state is not going to solve these problems (understaffing and overcrowding) in short order."

"The question," Smith said, "is whether or not the federal government is going to relax its regulations, faced with the realistic fact that some states are not going to be able to comply."

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## 12 NURSING HOMES FACE FUND CUTOFF

### State Facilities Are Short of Medicaid Standards

By PETER KIHSS

A dozen New York State government nursing homes, with 16,000 beds, may lose their Federal reimbursement for care of Medicaid patients on Dec. 31 because of noncompliance with Federal standards.

The problem of the state institutions—units of the Department of Mental Hygiene's schools for the mentally retarded including Willowbrook State School on Staten Island—be-

came known yesterday. The same deadline confronts 168 up-state proprietary and voluntary nursing homes with 5,800 beds.

The two groups combined represent nearly 40 per cent of the state's nursing-home beds—21,800 out of a total of 54,616. Nursing-home expenditures in the state's Medicaid program for the poor are more than \$200-million a year, not quite half of which is Federal funds. The rest is paid by the state and localities.

### 35 Escape Dec. 31 Cutoff

Officials of the Federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare said 35 of the 154 nursing homes in the city also might have been out of compliance except that the city Health Department reported deficiencies only last August instead of before last January.

Accordingly, deadlines for compliance by these 35 would only start running next month.

when they would still be eligible for the first of two six-month interim agreements pending upgrading.

Elmer W. Smith, regional commissioner of the H.E.W. social and rehabilitation service, said in an interview yesterday that the problem for the state institutions was primarily understaffing and overcrowding.

### 'Fiscal Crunch' Cited

"Under the present fiscal crunch," Mr. Smith said, "we know that the state is not going to solve these problems in short order."

"The question is whether the Federal Government is going to relax its regulations, faced with the realistic fact that some states are not going to be able to comply."

"We are working actively with the state on the whole question of compliance, and every indication is that the state has a constructive attitude toward the problem."

Federal regulations on stand-

ards for so-called skilled nursing homes to be eligible for Medicaid reimbursement were issued as of Jan. 1, 1970.

New York State, however, only began making the required provider agreements this year, covering quality of care and structural safety standards.

### 613 Homes in State

Commissioner Smith said the State Health Department had reported 613 nursing homes throughout the state, including 54 public, 149 voluntary and 410 proprietary. Of these, he said, five public, 48 voluntary and 101 proprietary, with a total of 21,400 beds, are in New York City.

Federal inspections, he said, indicated that "providers are not aware that Medicaid is a standards program as well as a mechanism for reimbursement."