

FOCUS

Question transfer of Willowbrook patients

Despite a signed memorandum of agreement between Willowbrook officials and the licensee for the Island View Nursing Home in Concord, state officials said last week that transfer of Willowbrook patients to the intermediate care facility is not definite.

"I'll be damned, if I'm going to be buffooned into moving our patients," Albert Robidoux, chief of the Community Services Unit at Willowbrook, said, "just because Israel Fogel (the licensee for the nursing home) wants them in his home in a couple of weeks.

Under a memorandum of agreement obtained by the Register, Willowbrook and representatives from the Island View Nursing Home set down specific conditions for the transfer of 240 Willowbrook patients.

This agreement was sharply criticized by some Island politicians, including Assemblyman Lucio Russo, as well as members of the Staten Island Mental Retardation Regional Council and union representatives of Willowbrook.

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They said that the plan does not provide Willowbrook residents with the type of care that is needed for them to progress.

Willowbrook officials were also criticized for not informing community representatives about the impending move.

Robidoux and other State Department of Mental Hygiene officials insisted last week that the moving of patients was not a fait accompli.

"First of all," Robidoux said, "we need the approval of the City Department of Social Services, which is going to have to pay for part of this. "Then we need the permission of relatives in order to make the move."

He also said that the facility, located at 1000 Targee St., next to Doctors' Hospital, had to pass a state inspection on May 7 before it can be certified as an intermediate care facility.

An intermediate care facility, according to a confidential report done by Willowbrook officials, is such a relatively new concept, that no state standards have as yet been set for them.

It is expected that any certification by the State Department of Health will be made based on federal standards for the facility.

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-Better-

Robidoux said that although the facility was not the ideal situation for Willowbrook patients, it is a vast improvement over Willowbrook.

"People are not receiving good care at Willowbrook," Robidoux said. "They're dying here, they're sleeping 40 in a room.

"When I saw a beautiful new facility that we could use," Robidoux said, "I got very excited. I know it's not an ideal situation, but at least we'll be able to put two or four people in a room."

However, members of the Staten Island Mental Retardation Regional Council questioned whether the residents would receive adequate care at Island View.

Because it is a profit-making venture, members of the council doubted the owners of the Island View center will spend enough money to give the residents the treatment needed.

Council members also objected to what they termed the inadequate training that employees at the new center would receive, and the absence of any outdoor recreation areas.

"It seems apparent to me," one member told the Register, "that all the state is trying to do is remove

patients from Willowbrook to meet a court order. I don't think they (the patients) will receive the kind of care they need."

The announcement of the pending move apparently means the end of the State Department of Mental Hygiene's policy of moving patients to smaller facilities in their community.

Most of the patients to be moved to Island View are believed to be from outside Staten Island.

Although Israel Fogel of Island View said that patients could be moved in as little as a week, Willowbrook officials now say that it will take at least a month before any transfers are made.

That's probably about how long opponents of the planned project will have to convince the state to alter its plan.