

Hospital Rule: Behave or Miss Meal

By WILLIAM HEFFERNAN

In the last year, selected patients at Bronx State Hospital have been put in a controversial experimental therapy program—one that denies patients one meal a day if they fail to act as required.

The program, uncovered in a News investigation of the \$36 million mental health hospital, is one of a series of programs that patients participate in before being returned to society.

The hospital, a modern complex in the east Bronx, began the program last September. Since that time an average of 25 patients have been kept isolated in the program for up to six months, despite objections from some members of the professional staff.

These patients are expected to perform certain basic tasks each day, such as waking at a prescribed hour without help, groom-

tokens each day. And if the patient has not earned two tokens, he simply does not eat lunch that day.

The token economy is only one of several problems discovered in a month-long News inquiry into the hospital. Others reported in a previous article and those to be published subsequently include severe fire dangers; serious incidents involving patients that were often not reported to the hospital's supervisory board and breaches in security affecting patient safety that have led the hospital to disregard the state's open-door policy for mental institutions.

Mrs. Ruth Spirito, a member of the hospital's board of visitors, which is a state supervisory body, told The News that she had received "more than a dozen complaints" from relatives of patients in the token economy program.

The complaints, she said, involved weight losses, "patients coming home for visits so they could eat" and cases of illness, including one patient who reportedly was hospitalized with a salt deficiency attributed in part to missed meals.

The News documented one case of a patient who lost 40 pounds after regularly missing meals under the program, but this was dismissed by the hospital director, Dr. Hugh Butts, who said,



Tokens, or mods: two of them will buy lunch.

"The patient was too obese any way."

Butts, who supports the program, insisted that the patients' physical health is closely monitored by the medical staff and that he knew of no adverse physical results.