

State raps drug records at 2 centers

The Department of Mental Hygiene's two Staten Island facilities—South Beach Psychiatric Center and Willowbrook Developmental Center—keep inadequate records relating to internal facility distribution and utilization of prescribed narcotic substances.

At neither facility, however, has there been found any evidence to indicate drug pilferage or diversion by employees or administrators.

Those were the two basic findings of a report issued by the State Health Department's bureau of narcotic control. The report detailed inadequate record keeping and poorly trained personnel to distribute the drugs at the Department of Mental Hygiene's 52 state institutions.

According to John J. Bellizzi, the narcotic bureau's director, the facilities need "tightening of record keeping" to make state audits easier and drug pilferage more difficult.

In the bureau's investigation, only one incident of drug diversion by a department employe was found, a minor case in the Rochester area, Bellizzi said.

The Department of Mental Hygiene's pharmacy consultant, Eugene E. Scerebini, has estimated that \$2.4 million in drug thefts took place in the state facilities last year. Shrinkage at the ward level, he said, ranged from 10 to 50 per cent.

That was not the finding of the Health Department, Bellizzi said, adding that it was "possible, very possible" that

other diversions have taken place and his 14-man team of auditors did not pick them up.

The department's next audit, after tighter records are kept, will enable the state to see how much is really being stolen from mental hygiene drug stockpiles, Bellizzi said.

In May, the Albany Times-Union cited rampant drug stealing at state facilities, prompting Assistant District Attorney Thomas Sullivan to investigate charges about thefts at Willowbrook.

Sullivan said yesterday that investigation turned up "no evidence" of drug thievery at the 2,800-bed home for the retarded.

The Health Department's report on Willowbrook contained an unrelated, but noteworthy, list of criminal events at Willowbrook for the first quarter of 1975, including 14 fire alarms, 13 assaults, 28 burglaries, 19 larcenies and 19 incidents of criminal mischief.

Statewide the bureau of narcotic control found:

¶ Most facilities were "lacking in control, especially after the drugs left the pharmacy and went to the substocks throughout the institutions."

¶ Lack of proper records "made it impossible to do a thorough accounting or audit of controlled substances."

¶ It could not be established that there was a widespread diversion of controlled substances, but "neither could it be concluded that there has not been a substantial diversion."

¶ Mental Hygiene Department therapy aides "were seriously lacking in proper training."

Bellizzi has concluded that unannounced inspections of state facilities, at least once a year, must take place, along with tighter administrative supervision and improved record procedures if drug abuse problems are to be avoided—or eliminated if they exist.

Bellizzi said that the inspections by the Health Department found conditions in city institutions run by the state to be better than upstate, with better overall drug-related practices.

—ROBERT MIRALDI