

# State tells families to be ready for patients

## If strike, state will empty wards

By PETER HARRIGAN

Officials of the Willowbrook Developmental Center and the South Beach Psychiatric Center yesterday asked families of residents at the institutions to be prepared to take the patients into their homes in the event state workers strike Monday.

A spokesman for Department of Mental Hygiene Commissioner Lawrence C. Kolb said the temporary discharging of tens of thousands of patients from the state's 20 developmental centers and 28 psychiatric centers is part of the agency's contingency plan to deal with the threatened strike.

About 145,000 state workers — including an estimated 3,000 at Willowbrook and about 600 at South Beach — are set to strike at 6 a.m. Monday unless the state and the Civil Service Employees Association reach agreement on salary increases before then.

The Department of Mental Hygiene would be among the agencies hardest hit by a strike since it is responsible for caring for more than 40,000 institutionalized individuals. There are currently about 2,500 resident patients at Willowbrook and over 300 inpatients at South Beach.

Kolb's spokesman said the families of residents at developmental and psychiatric centers were contacted by telephone yesterday and were asked to pick up patients before Sunday afternoon unless a wage accord is reached.

"We're hoping that a strike won't occur, but in the event of a strike we feel it would be best for residents to remain with their families for the duration," the spokesman said.

He added that administrative personnel and volunteers would be called on to help care for patients who would remain in institutions during the strike either because they have no families or because they need specialized care not readily available outside one of the state facilities.

At Willowbrook, one source said, about 300 volunteers who regularly work at the institution and a number of community service groups have been asked to assist in the event of a strike.

The source added, however, that Willowbrook officials have received "many negative responses" to their requests for help because some individuals and groups are reluctant to cross picket lines that might be set up.

**Emergency medical care would continue to be made available to institutionalized individuals by physicians and dentists employed at the facilities.**

Dr. Irving M. Jabitsky, vice president of the South Beach Psychiatric Center's chapter of the Association of New York State Mental Hygiene Physicians and Dentists, said organization members would support striking CSEA workers but would provide emergency medical services to patients when needed.

"We will not under any circumstances perform non-physician duties not related to our primary role as physicians," Dr. Jabitsky said. "We take this position in the light of our moral obligation to our patients and our commitment to unity with our co-workers."

Jabitsky said about 30 of the 40 physicians and dentists at South Beach are members of the statewide association, although he added that not all of the doctors are supporting the group's position.

"Some doctors are not supporting the strike and will report to work as usual," he added.

Although officials of the association's Willowbrook chapter could not be reached yesterday, Dr. Jabitsky said the position taken by South Beach doctors is similar to the stance of all of the statewide group's chapters.

Kolb's spokesman said other strike preparations being made include the stockpiling of food, clothing and laundry supplies at residential facilities and the cancellation of all vacations and leave time scheduled for next week.

Directors of DMH institutions have also been told to inform employees that under the state's Taylor Law they may be fined two days' pay for each day they stay off their jobs on strike, the spokesman said.

Other state agencies with offices on the Island, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Department of Labor, have said they will attempt to keep offices open with supervisory personnel in the event of a strike.

Another major state-run Island facility, the Arthur Kill Correctional Facility, is planning to press non-union supervisory personnel into service to prepare food and perform other necessary work if CSEA employees walk out.

Guards at the 600-inmate prison are not CSEA members and should not be affected by a strike unless they choose to honor picket lines set up by the other workers. The Department of Correctional Services reportedly has contingency plans — as yet undisclosed — to deal with a walkout by guards.

Aside from Willowbrook and the South Beach Psychiatric Center, DMH also operates the Institute for Basic Research in Willowbrook. A strike would force research work to halt and would necessitate the transfer of six patients who are housed at the institute.