

Sickout protest widens

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An apparent sickout by state workers at Willowbrook Developmental Center widened yesterday, as a protest to Wednesday's United Cerebral Palsy Association takeover of seven center buildings entered a second day.

The more than usual absences, limited to the UCP-run buildings the day the takeover was carried out, were reported yesterday in other publicly operated facilities as well.

But care for the retarded in the understaffed state buildings seemed to be proceeding yesterday afternoon with relatively little disruption.

In the UCP buildings, the private staff, ordered to work two days early to replace absent workers, brought the needed number of employes up to a normal complement, a Willowbrook administrator said.

The transition to private care in the baby complex and Buildings 13 and 15 went forward. Some confusion was reported, especially in the meals and na-

tures of the diets being given. Activities for the 641 affected residents, mostly children with physical as well as developmental handicaps, remained at a standstill during this initial phase of the takeover.

Elin Howe, Willowbrook's deputy director of administration, said absences among state workers yesterday were no higher than usual.

She said some staffing problems existed in the UCP buildings, but maintained they were attributable to "scheduling" difficulties.

The reasons the scheduling difficulties had occurred were unclear, Miss Howe said.

In Building 20, a state facility housing 88 profoundly retarded adults, supervisor Calvin Lowman said: "It's terrible. Out of 12 scheduled (for the afternoon shift), eight called in sick.

"It's only through the goodness of the day shift who have agreed to work an extra shift that we're able to maintain a basic level of staff," he said.

Building 29 also reported an unusually high rate of employes absent, five out of 12, according to a supervisor.

The apparent sickout in the UCP-controlled facilities continued, meanwhile, with state absences in the seven buildings listed at up to 50 per cent.

Felton King, president of Willowbrook's chapter of the Civil Service Employees Association, representing 4,500 institutional workers, said that his members' tempers are running high because of the takeover, but neither he nor his executive board had sanctioned a job action.

"But if there's some contagious flu or disease going around, then that's the way it is," King said.

Both state and UCP workers spoke yesterday of the confusing elements that accompany any change and the problems of working with new people in

an uncharacteristic situation.

John Brancato, a state therapy aide in Building 12 for 11 months, explained that one of the children he cares for used to help state staff by placing bedspreads.

But the UCP supervisory personnel who have taken over the facility favor another system, he said. The little boy, not understanding it their way, "gets a little upset now," Brancato said.

Private workers, some of whom said they had never worked with retarded people before, learned more about their new jobs and how to stimulate the children, help them learn.

But Donald Sperry, for one, the new administrator in Building 12, said he thinks the transitional period will only last about a month, to be followed by a complete restoration of routine.

Programs and activities for the children, at a standstill since Wednesday, should resume shortly, Sperry said, adding that program directors are already meeting to arrange individualized therapy plans.

Miss Howe explained the state Department of Mental Hygiene, which runs Willowbrook, plans to start shifting state workers from seven UCP-operated buildings Monday.

When the employes are transferred to the institution's 24 other residential facilities, improvements in programs for the residents still living under public care, approximately 1,700 of them, should improve, Miss Howe said.

"The increase in staff will allow us to provide much more flexible programs geared to the specific needs of the individual," she said. "The UCP takeover should really enable us to improve services to all of our residents."

Approximately 700 civil servants are affected in the takeover and more than 300 face job reassignment. Others have gone to work for UCP, with additional numbers to be staying in three UCP-buildings under a shared staffing arrangement.