

Mental health head denies community 'dumping' charges

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ALBANY — The acting deputy commissioner of the Department of Mental Hygiene yesterday denied charges that his agency is using strong-arm tactics to force directors of developmental centers to "dump" residents into community facilities.

As the Senate Committee on Mental Hygiene concluded hearings on his nomination to head the new Office of Mental Retardation, Thomas A. Coughlin acknowledged that the department has set quotas for the transfers throughout the state.

He explained that the goals had been developed as a part of a program, endorsed by Gov. Carey, to reduce the resident population of the state's 21 developmental centers, including Willowbrook Developmental Center, from 20,000 to 8,000 by 1982.

But Coughlin, who served as director at Willowbrook in 1976, said the program had been "qualified" and "slowed down" in areas that lacked adequate

community facilities — hostels, halfway houses, etc. — to absorb transferred residents.

He also denied that directors of the developmental centers have been threatened with the loss of their jobs if they fail to comply with the quotas. "No one has met the goals and no one's head has rolled," he told committee chairman Frank Padavan, R-Queens.

Coughlin was responding to charges from Dr. Margaret Rogler, the director of Newark Developmental Center in Wayne County. Earlier in the hearing she told Padavan that she was told by DMH budget officials that if she did not meet her quota this year, "Our heads will roll and your's along with us."

Dr. Rogler also attacked the community placement program, charging that it has been underfinanced and calling it "an insult to the retarded" as well as to the Legislature. "When this plan was formulated, there was no participation by anybody except a few bright boys in Albany," she declared.

In a surprise development, however, Dr. Rogler was herself attacked at the

hearing by Assemblyman James Hurley, R-Rochester. Hurley cited a DMH audit report concluding that Mrs. Rogler had put her three daughters on the Newark payroll and then showed them preferential treatment.

He also charged negligence in several deaths at the facility and testified that Mrs. Rogler recently ordered the exhumation of a resident's body without getting permission from a court or notifying the next of kin.

Coughlin said the DMH had dropped an earlier investigation of Dr. Rogler's alleged transgressions for lack of evidence but was opening a new inquiry as a result of the exhumation incident.

In other testimony at the hearing, a representative from an organization of community facility owners defended Coughlin against charges from the state civil service union that he has been "dumping" institution residents into day care homes run by profiteers.

James Flanigan, president of the Association of Community Residence Administrators, called the charges "completely false" and testified that his organization's facilities are run by boards partially composed of parents of retarded clients.

He also pointed out that the association must get approvals from the DHM and county agencies before opening a facility. "All of our residents must be involved in either vocational programs or competitive employment," he added.

Aides to Padavan said his committee would probably vote on Coughlin's nomination at a meeting within the next week.