

Study, officials agree: Mental hospital patients being drugged needlessly

By CLARENCE D. BASSETT

ALBANY, N.Y. (UPI) — Between 75 and 90 percent of the patients at three state mental hospitals were given psychotherapeutic drugs although clinical records often did not document the need for the prescriptions, a report made public today by state auditors charged.

An investigation by state Comptroller Arthur Levitt's office found that records for 57 percent of the patients did not always include justification for the drug doses, which in one case in 10 exceeded recommended maximum dosages.

In addition, 25 percent of the patients were given two or more drugs simultaneously and, despite studies that show that so-called polypharmacy increases the possibility of adverse reactions, none of the medical records included the reasons for multiple drug use.

Statemental health officials generally

agreed with the findings of the investigation.

James Prevost, commissioner of the Office of Mental Health said in a letter to the comptroller, "There is no doubt that errors in drug use and deficiencies in medical recording were discovered by the auditors on a number of occasions."

Prevost said "steps will be taken to eliminate deficiencies." He noted, "The Office of Mental Health is increasingly concerned with the quality of medical practices in its facilities."

A similar survey at a facility for the retarded, Letchworth Village Developmental Center, "found similar shortcomings," Levitt's report said.

Thomas Coughlin, commissioner of the Office of Mental Retardation, said he had established a committee "which is actively working on the development of guidelines and a formulary for the use of psychotherapeutic, anticonvulsant and other drugs."

The investigation used pharmaceutical specialists employed by the Department of Mental Hygiene to aid auditors in evaluating drug treatment.

The auditors reviewed randomly selected files of 285 patients at three psychiatric centers, Creedmoor, Rockland and Utica-Marcy, which have a total in-

patient population of 5,400 persons. A total of 105 patient files were examined at Letchworth.

"We found that most of the guidelines established by the department ... were not being followed," a summary of the report said. "The extent of deviation from the guidelines at the facility level showed a need for some type of monitoring of the compliance; for example, peer reviews.

"We noted that Rockland Psychiatric Center, by using a computerized monitoring system, had a better rate of compliance. DMH should therefore explore expanding the use of this system to other state centers."