

Grant gives dental care to retarded

By CLAIRE WILSON

Developmentally disabled residents of three Staten Island facilities will begin to receive comprehensive dental care for the first time this week under a \$100,000 grant.

At a rate of two persons a week, residents of the Staten Island Developmental Center, the United Cerebral Palsy Unit at the center and the Nina Eaton Center at the South Beach Psychiatric Center will be transported to the dental clinic at Maimonides Medical Center in the Borough Park section of Brooklyn.

"I think this is definitely a step in the right direction," said Dr. Philip Ziring, medical director at the Willowbrook developmental center. "It's an important first step, a groundbreaking. It just needs expansion."

The program is funded by the federal government and will be administered by the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities with evaluation and monitoring by the state Health Department.

Many of the handicapped residents the new program will serve have never had any kind of dental care because of the need for special services, including anesthesia for even the simplest procedure.

According to Dr. Murray Ross, who will administer the program, the long-term institutionalized patient on medication needs an average of 25 fillings, one extraction, one gingivectomy, four gum treatments and one type of preventive measure when he first comes in for care.

The dental program will provide these as well as instruction for preventive dentistry for the mentally retarded for staff members of the three facilities. It will also train new dentists in the care of special patient.

According to Thomas A. Coughlin, retardation commissioner, Maimonides was chosen over a hospital on Staten Island because of the clinic already operating there and the excellent back-up services the hospital can provide. The "typical" patients according to Ross, will require an overnight stay in the hospital for initial dental treatment and Maimonides can offer that as well as dental care. The cost of setting up even a limited dental facility for the retarded on the Island would be prohibitive, said Hilda Bell, president of the Maimonides board of trustees.

The dental clinic at Maimonides has operated for a number of years and was recently expanded to five examining rooms. Dental interns see an average of 200 to 250 patients weekly, about half of whom are children.

Considered a boon to mentally retarded in the city, the new dental program will reach few residents of the Island developmental center, according to Ziring. It is a program for children and most residents currently at the former Willowbrook are over 21 years of age and receive conventional dental treatment.

Gov. Carey met with Maimonides personnel yesterday, kicking off the program and forming the dental clinic. He told staff and onlookers that he has been fighting for such a dental program for 13 years, when he first went to officials of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and said, "Here's the pot, now where's the money?"

The governor reiterated his commitment to state employees who face layoff as the process of institutionalizing the Island developmental center continues. He said they would be found jobs in other facilities.

He cited, however, the high turnover among employees and the problem of finding well-qualified people to take jobs with the retarded, who he said "are very difficult to care for."

Carey repeated an earlier pledge that no group homes would be established without community consent, but predicted the decrease in resident population at the center will be accomplished by the 1981 target date. The state is under court mandate to reduce the center's population to 250 residents in 1981 but is well behind schedule in the placement of residents into community facilities.

The governor also said the system of contracting out services for the retarded to private groups has so far been successful, with early problems soothed by a necessary adjustment period.