



***"I won't play God. I'm not prepared, as Borough President Stein may be, to write someone off." — Mental Retardation Commissioner Thomas Coughlin***

sioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and developmental Disabilities and the former executive director of the Willowbrook Review Panel, said despite a lack of pretraining for the new MRI employees, it was imperative to move the patients from Gouverneur because of the "horrendous conditions there."

"I could not have seen any further delay in starting the program," said Dr. Howse, who oversees six state mental retardation facilities in the New York City-Long Island area. "The fire escapes were rusting off the buildings and the wiring was archaic."

Both Dr. Howse and Mental Retarda-

tion Commissioner Thomas A. Coughlin said that four recent deaths of residents at Flower & Fifth Ave. Hospital did not warrant, as Stein had charged, serious questions about the level of care at MRI.

The state conducted a full investigation, Coughlin said, and found no indication of patient neglect. Rather, he said, the deaths were indictative of the serious nature of the residents' conditions.

Coughlin also blasted Stein for saying that some of the MRI patients are so profoundly retarded that they probably will never be able to return to the community as fully functioning human beings.

"I won't play God," Coughlin said in an interview from his Albany office. "I'm not prepared as Borough President Stein may be to write someone off."

Coughlin also said that a state Health Department review was under way to determine if the Medicaid rate of \$245 a day a patient is justified. If MRI is not providing an appropriate level of services for that rate, Coughlin said funding will be lowered accordingly.

But Stein said that the rate was "unconscionable" and should never have been awarded in the first placed.

Stein was asked if he concurred with a union official who charged the high rate was merely a political move by Gov. Carey to win support from the Archdiocese of New York, which now runs the financially troubled college and institute Stein blinked and said, "Could be."