

HSA hears community views on needs for new health plan

By THOMAS CHECCHI

More comprehensive community health services, the need for adolescent care facilities, extension of alcoholism treatment programs and more in-depth study of environmental health hazards were among the concerns voiced by community spokesmen last night during a public hearing conducted by the Health Systems Agency's Staten Island office.

Community input on the Island's health problems and needs solicited during the hearing in the Eger Nursing Home, Egbertville, will go toward assembling the Health Systems Plan, a comprehensive system of health care for the borough.

The Island may soon get its first health care facility exclusively for the adolescent community if a grant application now being written is approved by the central HSA board and accepted by the state department of Health Education and Welfare, Dr. Israel Greenwald, chairman of the HSA office's personal and preventive health task force, said during the group's regular monthly meeting prior to the public hearing.

"The establishment of a facility combining health services, education and counseling for adolescents will be a real concrete step forward in the HSA's relationship with the Island community," Greenwald commented.

He explained the proposed facility would be established at a College of Staten Island site, with back-up health care services provided by Staten Island Hospital. The services provided would include dental, optometric and psychiatric care, and family planning.

"Adolescents are often put off or frightened by general health care services. They are concerned about confidentiality and whether or not the service can ac-

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commodate their special problems," Greenwald said, adding: "We are very excited and optimistic about this proposal."

Greenwald, who later spoke at the public hearing on behalf of the Richmond County Optometry Society, also cited the lack of visual screening for school children and proposed that the Health Systems Plan include an eye test program similar to the required dental examinations children undergo before entering school.

"Children don't learn through their teeth," he said. "And many visual impairments which do affect learning are often not noticed until it's too late."

The need for continued research and preventive programs for environment-related health problems, especially in light of recent studies that revealed a high incidence of cancer and pulmonary disease on the Island, was brought to the HSA panel's attention by Jocelyn Bobin, chairwoman of Community Board 1's human resources committee, and Charles Burger of the Island's HSA office.

Calling on the HSA to support further study of the health affects of air and water pollution on the Island, Burger stressed that the agency's concerns "must include environmental issues and not just health services."

In a separate interview, he also expressed concern for the potential health problems caused by different forms of radiation including that from microwave and radio wave facilities.

Ms. Bobin told the panel that the reports on lung disease on the Island are "useless unless there are follow-up studies, which can be used to establish preventive educational programs in the community."

Alcoholism education programs, expanded detoxification facilities, halfway houses more systematic outpatient programs and alcoholism programs aimed at specific sectors of the community were cited as essential parts of the agency's Health Systems Plan by Richard Watson of the Staten Island Committee on Alcoholism and William C. Hereford, director of the city's Department for the Aging's Island field office.

Explaining that special programs are needed to cope with alcoholism among senior citizens, Hereford said that current programs are hampered by societal prejudices.

"The myths concerning old age continue because of an ignorance about the subject," he said, and the result is "older alcoholics are forgotten and there are few geriatric alcohol treatment programs."

The need to develop up-dated programs to effect change in community attitudes concerning the care of health problems was emphasized by Dr. Philip Ziring, deputy director of the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook.

Citing the present lack of concern in the private sector, Dr. Ziring called for more comprehensive health care programs for former residents of the center, and for added support from the HSA for a newly established clinic and pharmacy in the Institute for Basic Research on the center's grounds.

Ziring pointed out, for example, that former center residents have difficulty filling prescriptions at island pharmacies because many use New York state Medicaid cards, which have a low reimbursement rate.

"I'm asking the HSA to put me out of business by supporting facilities in the community similar to the ones we've established in the institute," Ziring said, adding that to successfully deal with health problems in the community "we need HSA support and community response."

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Community representatives air their views concerning the Island's health care problems and needs before members off the Health Systems Agency's Island office.

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