

Officials seek big rate hike at Developmental Center

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ALBANY — State officials are asking for a 25 percent increase in allocations for each patient at the Staten Island Developmental Center beginning April 1.

According to figures released yesterday, the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities is seeking a daily per-patient rate of \$148, an increase of \$30 over the current rate at the Willowbrook institution. Approval of the increase is expected to win Bureau of the Budget and Legislative approval in the 1979-80 budget that takes effect April 1.

The per-patient rate is actually a Medicaid rate, funded with 50 percent federal and 50 percent city and state funding.

By means of comparison, Staten Island's 10 nursing homes receive a daily per-patient Medicaid rate ranging between \$46.75 and \$74 a day.

The proposed increase reflects a decline in the center's resident population and efforts to include such non-cash items as depreciation of buildings and equipment in the Medicaid rate for the first time to increase federal aid, according to state Mental Retardation officials.

"Even though we are reducing the population we still have the same basic costs to maintain the buildings and with staffing requirements of the consent decree there isn't much of a savings in staff assignments for direct care," said Cora Hoffman, spokeswoman for Mental Retardation Commissioner Thomas A. Coughlin. "We won't have any real savings until the institution is closed down."

The consent decree, signed in 1975 by Gov. Carey, guarantees minimum programming and staffing levels at state institutions serving former and current residents. It also requires the population to drop to 250 by 1981. Last year, state officials estimated that the cost of im-

plementation through last fall at \$336 million.

Reflecting the reduction in Willowbrook's population, mental retardation officials are proposing a \$106,000 cut in state funding at the institution in 1979-80 from \$42-million to \$41.89-million.

According to state estimates, the institution's population will decrease gradually over the next year from 1,500 to about 1,212. Those residents remaining are, for the most part, the most profoundly retarded who need the maximum staffing levels provided under the decree, mental retardation officials said.

The institution's population, once over 5,000, is being reduced under a policy of deinstitutionalization in which residents are transferred to smaller facilities in the community.

Robert Norris, special assistant to Commissioner Coughlin, said the proposed \$148 daily rate also reflects a 7-percent salary increase agreed to this week by state and union negotiators for state employees, including 3,000 at the Island institution.

"In addition, we are getting a lot more sophisticated in the way we calculate costs for our Medicaid rate," Norris said. "We're doing exactly what hospitals do."

Thus, for the first time Norris said such costs as depreciation of buildings and equipment are being included in the figures used to compute the institution's rate.

By increasing the rate, state officials are hoping to maximize federal contributions for the state's retardation programs.

State Mental Retardation officials are also requesting an increased Medicaid rate for United Cerebral Palsy of New York State's program at Willowbrook, which serves 553 retarded residents. Under the request, UCP's daily rate would increase from \$98.80 per patient to \$111.90.

The increase reflects the inclusion of

costs for such equipment as eye glasses and wheel chairs in the Medicaid rate for the first time, according to Meredith Harris, associate director for Programming.

Coughlin said he is requesting that New York Medical College's program for 146 retarded residents at Manhattan's Flower & Fifth Ave. Hospital continue to receive a daily Medicaid rate of \$247 per patient.

The program, which serves profoundly retarded and multi-handicapped patients who at one time resided at the center, is currently being audited by the state Health Department. Audit bureau sources predict that the program, the most expensive in New York State for the retarded, will probably lose at least \$20 in its daily rate.

Last week members of the Willowbrook Review Panel, a court monitor, labeled the 10 month-old program a failure and recommended that residents be transferred to another facility by Sept. 30. Coughlin, who says the high price tag is justified because of the specialized services provided the hospital's patients, said he will fight the review panel request.