

# Audit rips into bookkeeping at Willowbrook

By MICHAEL AZZARA

In a 30-month period, the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, virtually disregarded accountability for patients' cash, state funds and supplies, maintained incomplete financial records, contravened state guidelines in its payroll practices and lacked adequate controls over equipment and safety, State Comptroller Edward V. Regan reported today.

Because of poor bookkeeping practices, auditors were not always able to

verify the center's records, it was disclosed in an audit by Regan's office.

"While we found no misappropriation," the audit states, "the conditions existing are an open invitation to such acts and would be almost impossible to detect."

Although the report deals largely with financial practices, not with patient care, auditors reviewed the death of 17 residents in a 12-month period and found that "some future deaths might be averted if certain center practices were changed."

The state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities agreed with all recommendations in the audit and said the center had begun to implement many of them.

The audit was conducted from Oct. 1, 1976, to March 31, 1979. A state auditor said it was prompted by articles in the Advance dealing with the cost of implementation of the 1975 Willowbrook consent judgment. The judgment, the basic thrust of which is to reduce the institution's population from more than 5,000 to about 250 by next year, was entered

into by the state and parents and guardians of center residents in Brooklyn Federal Court.

In 1972, then Comptroller Arthur Levitt conducted an audit that uncovered practices similar to those turned up by the Regan study. At that time, the Mental Hygiene Department, the state agency operating the center, agreed with the audit recommendations and pledged to implement them.

A spokesman for the comptroller reported that an audit is now under way of the United Cerebral Palsy operation at

the center.

The main body of the Regan report is 50 pages long and there are appendixes, supporting documents and a management summary.

In a section dealing with residents' cash, it notes that on March 31, 1979, there was a balance of \$700,000 in the residents' account.

The report states, however, that "the trial balances were not reconciled to the cashbook even though large discrepancies existed, the amount of interest earned was not properly recorded, and

there was no control over cash receipt books."

A comparison of individual cash ledger cards and cashbook balances showed variances that seemed to get progressively larger, the audit reveals.

In July 1978, a trial balance of the ledger cards showed more than \$882,000 or \$2,353 more than the cashbook balance. In August, the discrepancy dropped to \$1,228.

In September, however, the cashbook balance exceeded the trial balance by \$200 (Continued on Page 6)

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