

Q UCP has, on several occasions, made purchases from and awarded contracts to firms with which UCP officials or their families are associated. It also failed, in at least one case, to report the potential conflict of interest to state monitors.

Q UCP has established a profit-making store from which patients must buy shoes, clothing and other personal items at prices in some cases far above the normal retail price. UCP also has drawn upon patients' personal funds to pay for purchases from its store

The sorry fact is that the state is unable to either support UCP's claims of innocence or to answer the questions raised by the Advance's investigation. The fact is that the state cannot adequately monitor the activities of UCP and the scores of other agencies with custodial care of retarded citizens. The fact is that no government agency today seems to be in a position to provide the sort of intensive monitoring essential if some of the same abuses that became synonymous with Willowbrook are to be prevented from occurring again.

And that should raise not only cries of alarm, but also demands for immediate, remedial action.

To date, the state has conducted only one detailed financial audit of UCP, which cares for nearly 1,000 persons on Staten Island and elsewhere in the state. That audit, completed last winter, found that UCP had kept \$10.5 million in excess Medicaid payments for which it had billed the state and federal governments over three years.

As a result of that single audit, UCP was forced to return nearly \$7 million in public funds to Albany and Washington.

Some say UCP has, on the whole, provided the retarded persons in its care with a better life than they could have hoped for had they remained in the state's custody. Some also have accused the Advance, and others who have questioned some aspects of UCP's performance, of "nitpicking."

But the fact is that questions raised by the Advance should have been raised by the state, and were not. That is hardly surprising since the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities has a staff of only 20 auditors to monitor the activities of UCP and more than 270 other agencies.

The scandal of Willowbrook arose because people in positions of responsibility did not care about the manner in which the retarded were being treated. When the Advance and others who did care brought the horror of Willowbrook to the public's attention, genuine reforms were won.

But those reforms will not survive on their own merits. They will survive only if buoyed by constant vigilance and concern.

It is clear that the state has not been as vigilant as it should have been in monitoring the affairs of UCP. Responsible officials and legislative committees — including the Assembly Mental Health Committee, chaired by Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly of West Brighton — must act to guarantee that abuses do not once again gain a foothold in the mental health system in New York State.

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