

Can it be that no official wonders about UCP's practice of forcing patients to buy clothing, shoes and other personal items from a UCP store that charges far in excess of retail prices?

Can it be that no official is outraged that UCP, during one three-year period, overcharged the state and federal governments by nearly \$7 million for patient care?

Can it be that the state is backsliding, slowly but surely, to the point where the mentally retarded were forgotten citizens?

The answer to all of those questions, we're sorry to say, appears to be "yes."

The governor seems to have washed his hands entirely of the problems of the mentally retarded, preferring to rest on his laurels even though they've obviously wilted with age.

Legislative committees, which have been acquainted with the questions raised by the Advance series, seem to think there's nothing they can do. They seem to believe that a financial audit of UCP, now being conducted at the request of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, will provide adequate answers to all of the questions that have been raised.

That attitude is truly unfortunate, for it indicates that, so far as public officials are concerned, care for the mentally retarded has been reduced to a matter of dollars and cents. Gone is the sense of humanity, and of decency, that dominated discussion of care for the retarded only a few years ago.

There is more than money at stake. The real issue that needs to be placed on the public agenda is whether the state — having surrendered responsibility for the care of thousands of mentally retarded individuals to private organizations — is able to guarantee that those individuals are receiving the sort of care to which they're entitled.

That no one seems willing to address that issue head-on is to suggest that all of the concern expressed by public officials a few years ago was nothing more than a shallow political response to an issue that happened to be making headlines at the time.

If that's not the case, responsible public officials must take immediate steps — including legislative hearings and intensified audits of both services and finances — to determine whether the retarded are in fact receiving the sort of care everyone has agreed they're entitled to.