

# Shakeup ordered in UCP staffing

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

Complaining of financial hardship, United Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State has announced plans to reorganize staffing, particularly at its \$26-million institution for the mentally retarded in Willowbrook.

During a series of staff meetings in the past two weeks, officials of the charitable agency have described job changes that some of its 2,300 employees believe will jeopardize the quality of care provided to mentally retarded patients.

Keith Penman, a United Cerebral Palsy administrator, attributed the shakeup to a budget deficit created by the pending federal cutback in Medicaid funding, employees who attended the meetings said.

United Cerebral Palsy spends a \$31-million annual budget to house and treat nearly 1,000 retarded patients statewide, and the agency relies on Medicaid to supply more than 86 percent of that budget.

But state mental retardation officials, who approve United Cerebral Palsy's Medicaid rate, said yesterday it is too early to predict whether the agency will suffer from President Reagan's reduction in Medicaid.

"At this point, we have not been given any direction as to how Medicaid cuts will affect individual programs at UCP or anywhere else for that matter," said David Picker, special assistant on federal relations in the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

United Cerebral Palsy employees complained that the reorganization, scheduled to take effect Sept. 14, appears to favor highly-paid administrators while designed to force out workers who dress, feed and care for the retarded patients.

The plan has stirred furor among low-level employees, who contend they are being pushed to resign, despite an avowed policy of avoiding layoffs, by changes that adversely affect their career, family and social lives.

"If you ask questions, you're labeled a bad person," said a therapy aide at the Karl D. Warner Center, United Cerebral Palsy's 450-bed institution in Willowbrook. "They told us in so

(Continued on Page A 2)

# Shakeup set for employees at UCP center

(From Page A 1)

many words that if we don't like it, we can quit."

A teacher aide said the agency had diverted some resentment by making a scapegoat out of Reagan's economic policy, which the primarily black and Hispanic workforce distrusted anyway. Like other employees, the teacher aide asked not to be named.

United Cerebral Palsy officials declined to discuss the specifics of the shakeup or the agency's purported financial problems yesterday.

"There is a reorganization of the entire staff which was part of our plans for the past six months or so," Walter Rosenthal, the agency's public relations director, said.

"It's no secret, and it's nothing out of the ordinary. I think all organizations re-evaluate their structures all the time."

Contending that the plan threatens patient welfare by slashing staff who come in direct contact with the retarded, employees outlined it as follows.

¶ Direct care staff — who dress and feed the retarded patients — are being given more responsibility. Instead of one worker per four patients at the Warner Center, the ratio will be 1 to 6, although only patients who can walk are affected.

¶ The workload of building administrators at the Warner Center is being doubled. Each administrator will handle two buildings, with about 160 patients and several hundred workers in each pair of buildings.

¶ Also at the Warner Center,

59 teacher aides are being demoted to therapy-aide status. In a move some workers say is calculated to discourage union organizing by the United Federation of Teachers, both teacher and therapy aides are being renamed "aides."

¶ Direct care staff at the Warner Center are being denied customary Saturdays and Sundays off. Instead, they will be assigned weekdays off, when they will be replaced by part-time help. It is a change the staff, whose base pay is \$9,500, predict will increase absenteeism.

¶ The upper administrative ranks, responsible for both institutions and group homes, are being fattened. New positions include four regional directors at a base salary of \$32,000; four associates and eight assistants, at starting salary from \$25,000 to \$27,000.

Picker, the special assistant in the Office of Mental Retardation, said that overall, social agencies in New York State expect to lose 3 percent of their federal Medicaid allowance in fiscal 1982.

But he added that various forms of relief may reduce the loss to 1 percent and that the Office of Mental Retardation is expected to feel the impact less than other agencies.

An audit completed earlier this year by state Comptroller Edward V. Regan found that United Cerebral Palsy had improperly kept or overbilled for \$10.5 million in Medicaid funds. The agency has returned part of the money, but is disputing that it owes the remaining \$3.6 million.