

Our opinion

UCP plan doesn't add up

Aren't the United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) Associations of New York State being a bit premature, and perhaps a bit excessive, by developing a staff reorganization plan based on Medicaid reductions even before the full impact of those reductions is known?

It certainly seems that way, and for that reason the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities — which supervises UCP's care of nearly 1,000 retarded persons on Staten Island and elsewhere — should take a critical look at UCP's budget-cutting plan *before* it's put into operation.

According to those who have sat in on UCP's strategy sessions, the organization has made plans to reduce payroll costs by increasing the number of ambulatory patients individual staffers are responsible for, by increasing the workload of building administrators and by reclassifying some workers in what amounts to a demotion. UCP says the plan, which it intends to put into effect on Sept. 14, is needed to offset a loss in Medicaid funds stemming from cutbacks ordered by the Reagan administration.

But let's look at the numbers.

Of UCP's annual \$31 million budget, 86 percent — or \$26.6 million — is made up of Medicaid funds. State officials say that while social agencies in New York expect to lose 3 percent of their Medicaid income in the 1982 fiscal year, or about \$798,000 in the case of UCP, various forms of supplemental aid may effectively cut that loss to 1 percent.

In UCP's case, then, the actual loss of funds stemming from Medicaid cuts would amount to 1 percent of \$26.6 million, or \$266,000.

That is a lot of money, of course, particularly if the organization on the losing end has no way of making it up. But UCP doesn't exactly seem to be in dire financial straits.

According to those familiar with UCP's plans, the organization intends to create at least 16 new administrative positions even as it is reducing direct care to patients. The new positions include four regional directors, at a base salary of \$32,000 each, and four associates and eight assistants, each with a minimum salary of \$25,000.

Those additional administrative salaries add up to \$428,000 a year, which happens to be a good deal more than what UCP stands to lose in Medicaid funds under the scenario envisioned by state officials. One might ask, then, why UCP finds it necessary to cut patient services even as it plans to fatten its own bureaucracy.

UCP officials, given an opportunity by an Advance reporter to answer that question, declined to do so.

But that silence should not be the final word. State officials, including legislators such as Assembly Mental Health Committee Chairwoman Elizabeth Connelly of West Brighton, should demand a detailed explanation of UCP's budget-trimming plan before that plan is put into effect. The only thing worse than a premature reduction in patient services would be official toleration of cuts that might prove to be quite unnecessary.