

Public hospital interns sue feds

By STEVIE
LACY-PENDLETON

Nine interns at the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital in Clifton filed suit yesterday, claiming the federal government has reneged on its promise to find them alternative training programs.

The suit, bought yesterday in Manhattan Federal Court by the interns specializing in ophthalmology, orthopedics and radiology, claims there are no other openings for their training in private or other government facilities.

According to the suit, Health and Human Services Secretary Richard Schweiker issued a notice, effective yesterday, providing for the termination of certain aspects of the federal health service and clinic systems.

St. Vincent's Medical Center has submitted a proposal to take over the facility and the plan is pending before Schweiker. The plan calls for operating approximately 200 beds but St. Vincent's has not included an internship residency program in the proposal.

The suit charged that last March 27 the nine doctors were

informed that they could be placed in other federal training programs or be aided in finding positions with private hospitals.

Despite the promise, the complaint says, "all attempts to find suitable substitute residency training programs have been futile."

The suit charged that federal officials "have totally failed to abide by their acknowledged responsibility to assist plaintiffs in completing their residence training program."

The suit ask the court to direct Schweiker and other officials to place the plaintiffs in private residence programs or other federal training programs in New York City and to be paid by the public health service.

The federal government had proposed continuing to operate the Clifton hospital through April while deciding the fate of the possible private takeover.

According to a spokesman for the plaintiffs, their job status would have been in jeopardy regardless of any successful funding.

Congressman Guy V. Molinari, one of the main supporters of the St. Vincent's takeover proposal, admitted yesterday, "it may very well be that the intern program would be stopped regardless of a possible eventual takeover by St. Vincent's."

The suit was brought on behalf of the nine doctors by the Manhattan law firm of Simpson Thacher and Bartlett and was submitted by former U.S. attorney Whitney North Seymour, Jr.

Justice Constance Motley is expected to set a date to hear the injunction suit today in Manhattan Federal Court.