

# Psych center probe reveals 'deficiencies'

## South Beach facility's accreditation Violations could affect

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

A federal inspection has uncovered a variety of "deficiencies" at the South Beach Psychiatric Center, including the improper use of drugs and physical restraining devices, overcrowding and an unsanitary environment.

The findings could "seriously jeopardize" the state mental hospital's accreditation, according to Alan J. Saperstein, associate regional administrator of health standards and quality for

the federal Department of Health and Human Services.

The Health and Human Services Department conducted the inspection over two days at the end of last October. Saperstein said a team consisting of two physicians, a nurse, a pharmacist and a nutritionist visited the main 340-bed hospital in Ocean Breeze and its satellite wards in Brooklyn.

In one of many critical comments, the survey team said it found "extensive use" of camisoles, commonly known as

straightjackets, and of net devices for pinning patients to their beds. The use of such restraints "in modern-day psychiatric care and treatment is considered unacceptable," their report said.

Saperstein said yesterday that "without sensationalizing," he had found "an element of seriousness" in the inspection results.

But Dr. James A. Prevost, the state mental health commissioner, said the federal report presented an overly "dramatic"

view, exaggerating problems at the hospital. South Beach administrators declined comment.

In a Feb. 18 letter to the Health and Human Services Department, Dr. Prevost wrote: "While I appreciate that there have been a number of issues at South Beach that are now being addressed, I do not feel that a straightforward interpretation of HHS requirements would lead one to the dramatic conclusions you cite."

The federal inspectors found

that nurses were administering medication from "unclear" prescriptions. "Following such orders would result in subjecting patients to unnecessary risks of adverse reactions from overdoses of drugs," the report said.

The team noticed what it considered a pattern of faulty diagnosis when patients were admitted to the hospital. Physical examinations were "often perfunctory" and omitted neurological screening, the report said. Psychological profiles, it said, too often used "sketchy and very

brief" descriptions.

The inspectors reviewed the charts of five patients who were discharged from South Beach and then committed suicide by violent means such as "jumping off of high buildings." These patients were treated for schizophrenia, but a more accurate diagnosis would have called for antidepressant drugs and electroconvulsive therapy, the report said.

"In a number of instances, the

(See CENTER, Page A 5)