



South Beach Psychiatric Center workers let their feelings be known about Gov. Mario Cuomo's layoff plans. S.I. Advance Photo by Steve Zaffarano

Psychiatric workers protest cuts

By JOHN E. HURLEY

About 100 workers, including psychiatrists, social workers, and registered nurses, staged a noon-time rally at the South Beach Psychiatric Center yesterday to protest budget cuts proposed for the state Office of Mental Health that would mean transfers and layoffs at both South Beach and

other state mental health facilities.

The rally was called by the Public Employees Federation (PEF) in response to Gov. Mario M. Cuomo's planned elimination of 2,000 mental health jobs state-wide.

Even as the workers were rallying, more than 200 out-patients

who are treated at the Island's only South Beach-run satellite clinic — located at 392 Seguire Ave. in Princes Bay — were being notified that that facility will be closed.

South Beach Psychiatric Center currently operates 10 out-pa-

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Rally

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tient clinics — nine of them in Brooklyn — where about 6,000 patients are treated. It could not be learned yesterday whether any of the Brooklyn facilities have also been targeted for closing. South Beach director Dr. Lucy Rea Sarkis referred questions from the press to her public relations office.

David Bloom, psychiatric supervisor at the satellite clinic, said no date was given for the closing of the South Shore facility. "All we were told was 'budget.' We've got 200 patients here and they're all very upset and despondent."

Bloom said the out-patient clinic, staffed by four workers, has been operating opposite Richmond Memorial Hospital for

about five years. He said most of the patients who are treated there have no way of getting to the South Beach facility and could conceivably wind up as in-patients — at a cost to the state of \$350 per day.

"That's why I really don't understand this," he said. "The rent here isn't all that much money." Bloom said he himself is being transferred to in-patient work at South Beach.

One woman who called the Advance and said she was a patient at the Seguine Avenue facility said the news had taken her and other patients by surprise. "It's a shock to all of us," she said. "I can't believe they're doing this."

Union officials have said that out-patient services would probably be the most severely hurt by

the mental hygiene budget cuts. Also affected would be workers at the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook and programs operated by the Staten Island Mental Health Society.

Barry Markham, PEF union leader at South Beach, said about 60 or 70 members of South Beach's 1,000-member staff would be laid off unless the proposed cuts are restored. Ira Kleinman, a spokesman for the psychiatric center, said the official number of layoffs could come today.

"The budget cannot be balanced on the backs of state workers," said union official Delia Gwaltney while workers carried signs and shouted slogans outside the main administration building. "We're already given up sick time, vacation time, insurance and other benefits. The deficit must be borne equally by all the residents of New York State."

Ms. Gwaltney said her union supports a "broad-based" tax surcharge on all New York State residents to help balance the budget.

Other workers argued that essential services to the mentally ill would be critically impaired if staffs at already crowded facilities are reduced.

"The doctor-patient relationships will be completely disrupted by layoffs and bumping," said Dr. Irving Jabitsky, a psychiatrist. "On top of that, the state will never be able to attract doctors and nurses if they continue to lay off staff."

Workers said that South Beach now treats about 350 in-patients and another 6,000 outpatients in Staten Island and western Brooklyn, many through about 10 "satellite offices" — all of them but the Seguine Avenue facility located in Brooklyn.

"We have a commitment here to try and treat patients and keep them well — to keep this place from becoming just another backward," said Marilyn Mishaan, a registered nurse with 10 years on the job at South Beach. "I won't lose my job because I'm a nurse. But I won't stay here if this place is going to be allowed to deteriorate."

A March 3 rally of all down-state mental hygiene workers is being planned at the World Trade Center. Union officials also discussed plans for a March 16 rally in Albany, when legislators will be considering the 1983 budget.

David Green, assistant to union president Elizabeth Hoke, sidestepped questions about a possible strike, noting that the Taylor Law forbids state employees from striking.

Meanwhile, another union leader at South Beach, George

Boncoraglio of the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), said his union recommends a one-to-two-year income tax surcharge on all state residents with gross income of \$30,000 and above as one way of averting the layoffs.

Boncoraglio also said that while the CSEA supports the aims of yesterday's rally, it did not co-sponsor the demonstration because "we feel an individual demonstration will not have a major impact on the budget." He said his group favored lobbying state legislators as a way of restoring the cuts.

The PEF represents about 600 professional staff at the center, such as doctors, psychologists and social workers. The Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) represents mental hygiene aides, drivers, food service workers and other "direct service" workers.