

Many serious faults cited in SIDC audit

By DAN JANISON
Advance Staff Writer

"Serious deficiencies" have afflicted the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, from uncontrolled drug stock and dubious supply purchases to some workers' neglect of retarded patients, according to a state audit.

"We have made many recommendations to upgrade operations at the center and to correct the many deficiencies we found," state Comptroller Edward V. Regan, whose office released the scathing audit report, said yesterday.

Among the findings were that some therapy aides left wards unattended at night, large supply orders were split to avoid competitive bidding, and excess and contaminated drugs were not disposed of properly.

The center bought fruit juice at three times the price otherwise available, according to the 21-page report.

Auditors also found that control over residents' cash was "poor"; the wording of a request for bids on a pest extermination contract was set up to the advantage of a certain bidder; the community store had "poor internal controls," and certain cases of absenteeism went unrecorded.

Many of the audit findings are more than a year old.

Managers of the developmental center, which is due under court order to reduce its patient population to 250 by next March, said in audit documents that many of the reforms suggested by Regan have been accomplished or are under way.

"Officials ... indicated they would take prompt corrective actions," Regan said.

Release of the audit follows several recent news developments affecting the center.

In January, Gov. Mario M. Cuomo's announced that the center should close entirely by 1987, marking a symbolic end to an "era of neglect" of the mentally retarded and disabled embodied in what was once the infamous Willowbrook State School.

Earlier this month, the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities took over the Karl D. Warner Center, a treatment facility on the Willowbrook grounds, from United Cerebral Palsy, which was in financial trouble.

The most shocking of the recent accounts was that of a retarded female patient who gave

SIDC

(From Page 1)

birth last month, the result of a rape, which authorities say happened at the center last spring.

The report issued yesterday raises the security issue but does not mention that crime.

According to the audit:

● On a surprise visit on Nov. 11, 1982, staffers found the two therapy aides assigned to Ward 53 at the center, housing about 20 residents, "asleep while on duty" at 3 a.m.

A half-hour later, "two of the three staff assigned to another ward appeared to have woken up just before being found in a dark dormitory area," according to Regan staffers.

"We observed a naked resident roaming the ward unattended," in that same ward, the auditors said.

Three employees could not be found at their duty stations, though their records did not show them charging "leave time."

Employees had locked themselves in using a "bitt key" in the door, causing a possible safety problem, the report said.

In addition, "a check of sign-in and sign-out sheets for a two-week period showed that six staff were absent for a total of 40 hours without deducting any leave credits from their records."

Regular floor checks by supervisors were among the recommendations.

● Large orders for items such as aluminum foil and plastic jugs were "split to avoid competitive bidding." Five written bids must be solicited for purchases above \$1,500 under state rules. "At times, the center's purchasing unit circumvented this regulation by splitting a purchase into several orders, which were then issued to the same vendor within a relatively brief period."

Service contracts issued from the center also came under fire. In another case, center officials "grossly overstated" the man-hours for a pest extermination contract.

"This gave the previous contractor an unfair advantage in the bidding process," Regan said. "Knowing the job would not take so long, he was able to keep his bid low. Another bidder said he would have bid even lower if he had been given a more realistic estimate of the man-hours required."

Low bid on the contract was \$33,465 while the other bids were \$74,489 and \$79,995.

Names of the bidders involved were not printed in the audit report.

Commodities costing more than \$1,500 total included fruit

juices. The center paid a private vendor \$23,000 in one year — "three times as much as they would have paid ordering through the state Office of General Services."

The community store at the center, with annual sales of \$500,000, "had poor internal controls."

Supplies were purchased independently of the business office, while the store manager accounted for and deposited the vending machine revenues — \$76,000 in 1982 — "without any independent office review."

In the 19 months preceding October 1982, the center store processed cash receipts and disbursements totaling \$3.8 million and \$3.9 million respectively.

"Record keeping has greatly improved since our prior review, when we were unable to verify receipts and disbursements," the auditors stated. However, they also reported that several receipt books had duplicate receipt numbers, making some money difficult to account for.