

# New criticism hits Developmental Center

By JULIE MACK  
Advance Staff Writer

"Ninety-five percent" of the problems cited in an audit of Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) by the state comptroller's office have been resolved, according to the institution's director.

But James Walsh now must address a new set of deficiencies brought to light by another, more recent survey conducted by the state Health Department.

The state facility for the mentally retarded, which currently houses about 1,000 patients, made headlines earlier this week, when the comptroller's office released copies of its audit report last weekend. That report cited major problems in payroll and personnel practices, purchasing, inventory control, cash management and management of the community store.

However, because the comptroller's office conducted its study during 1981 and 1982, the observations were based on facts that were 18 months to 2½ years old. Moreover, the state Office of Mental Retardation

and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), which operates SIDC, made changes last year based on the report's findings.

The only exception was a change involving the community store's bookkeeping practices, which are scheduled for revision on April 1, the beginning of the 1984-85 fiscal year.

"The (comptroller's) audit is old. We've essentially completed clearing up these items," OMRDD Commissioner Arthur Webb said. "I think it's getting blown out of proportion."

Walsh, who was the new deputy director of institution administration when the survey was made, said he worked closely with the auditors.

"In fact, some of the issues pointed out by them were already being addressed by our staff," he said. "We were using them almost like outside consultants to make recommendations on how we could improve things."

"By the time they left, about 75 percent of the issues had already been addressed and now it's about 95 percent. The final issue will be resolved March 30,

when we implement new controls at the community store. There we had to wait until the end of the fiscal year."

Meanwhile, Walsh's attention has turned toward correcting deficiencies pointed out by the state Health Department in a survey made in December.

The 22-page report listed four areas of concern, including rehabilitation services, food services, control of pharmaceuticals and physical plant and environment.

However, a Health Department spokesman said that SIDC was "about par" with other developmental centers in the city. He hinted that two of the problems — rehabilitation services and physical plant and environment — were at least partially beyond the institution's control.

In rehabilitation services, the report said that lack of physical therapy was a chronic problem.

"While there is not a total lack of therapy services, the supply does not meet the need," Jerome Wolf, chief health care management systems analyst for the

Page 1 of 2

Health Department, said. "But the problem is generally one found throughout the industry, and Staten Island is on par in this area with all the other developmental centers in the city."

Wolf said that state institutions have difficulty recruiting physical therapists because they cannot not offer competitive salaries.

Another problem cited by the state was deficiencies in the institution's physical plant. The SIDC buildings, constructed in the 1930s, do not meet many code requirements, including those for toilet stalls, viewing windows from nurses' stations, number of exits, door sizes and unlocked windows.

"As the requirements have been upgraded, the facility has not," Wolf said.

Other deficiencies found by the state centered on food service and control over drug supplies.

On food service, investigators found problems with equipment maintenance, including dishwashers that did not work and resulted in employees washing

dishes by hand.

Also, hot food was allowed to become too cold and cold food became warm before it was served. "While it's not unsanitary, it's just plain unappetizing," Wolf said.

On drug supply, Wolf said officials surveyed 11 patients and discovered omissions in medication for four of them. "The random review indicated a failure to give the drug or a failure to record that it was given," Wolf said.

"We also found that drugs which were discontinued or outdated were not returned to the pharmacy for disposition, and in fact, were found in areas where they could be dispensed to patients."

He said SIDC submitted this week a "plan of corrective action" to address the Health Department report. That plan must be approved by the Health Department. Assuming it is implemented, the department will conduct another survey within three months "to see if they are doing what they said they would do," Wolf said.

Another survey was conducted

at SIDC last week, this one by the federal Health Care Finance Administration, which oversees agencies receiving Medicare or Medicaid monies.

A spokeswoman from the agency said its report has not yet been compiled, and therefore she could not comment on its findings.

However, she said, "I don't think we have any disagreements with the Health Department's findings."

Walsh said he was confident he could correct the shortcomings and satisfy state and federal investigators.

"They indicated that we had a number of major deficiencies, but with an acceptable plan of correction, they did not see any problems with continuing our funding," he said.

Webb is also confident that SIDC can overcome negative findings in the surveys.

"I'm not worried," he said. The federal Department of Health and Human Services "recently found the facility certifiable. I'm not certain everything is perfect, but when we have a problem we're going to correct it."

Page 2  
Page 2