

125 deficiencies cited by feds, state

Reports rip into SIDC conditions

By JULIE MACK
Advance Staff Writer

The federal government is threatening to stop Medicaid payments to Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) if the institution fails to correct more than 125 deficiencies cited in new survey.

Alan Saperstein, associate regional administrator of the federal Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), said his agency was "very concerned" about the conditions it found at SIDC during a visit the week of Feb. 6. The institution in Willowbrook houses more than 800 mentally retarded persons, many of them multi-handicapped.

The report was obtained by the Advance through the Freedom of Information Act. Its release follows another report on SIDC released last week by the Office of the Special Master and the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

The state report, based on an audit conducted in May, cited many of the same problems found by federal investigators, but the federal report is much more critical.

Among the observations it made were:

- "The human rights of clients were not safeguarded and their human dignity was not fostered, as evidenced by the number of clients observed nude in Buildings 11, 13 and 15 on the morning

of (Feb. 10). Female clients were completely exposed to staff and visitors, both male and female ... A male client was in the dining room in his underwear. He was fully exposed ... Female clients were in close proximity ... There was no attempt by staff to address the situation."

- "There was inadequate monitoring of communicable infections ... the infection committee met only once in 1983 ... Over 100 residents were identified as hepatitis carriers. There was no specialized program to prevent the potential spread of the infection ... Ophthalmic, optic and nasal drops were administered from stock bottles among the different residents ... Disinfection of eating utensils was not satisfactory."

- "(On Feb. 10) in Building 15, clients came to the dining room in an assortment of nightclothes and underwear and many had bare feet. One client was barefoot and had a soiled bandage on one foot."

- "In Building 5, Ward C, dirty clothes were littered on the floors of rooms at the top of the stairs. The water fountain was filthy, encrusted with an unknown substance. Garbage was found in the lockers. The clothing room was filled with garbage and empty cans ... (In Building 7, Ward C) the privacy curtains (in the bathroom) were covered with an unidentified brown substance. In the day-

SIDC

(From Page 1)

room, a large bloody dressing was found on the window sill. In D Ward bathroom, feces were smeared on two toilets and the walls behind."

● "Many residents were observed to be too drowsy or too sedated to participate in habilitation programming."

The HCFA's biggest complaints came against the institution's food service.

● "The dietary department is totally disorganized ... supervision is non-existent and staffing other than dietitians is inadequate. The department is constantly in a state of crisis management ... Meal service is haphazard with no assurance that a nutritionally adequate diet is being provided for all clients."

According to the report, food was often mixed together on trays in an unappetizing manner; it was not prepared in a sanitary manner; monitoring of clients' dietary needs was inadequate; the delivery system was capricious, and foods were not kept at proper temperatures.

Moreover, the report cited examples of badly prepared or spoiled food being served. One day, clients were given badly spoiled bananas. The same day, gelatin provided to clients in one building was in liquid form. Another day, the "bacon was very greasy ... the scrambled eggs were a pudding-like consistency and were not identified as scrambled eggs."

In addition, the report said, "Food was not always served in a form consistent with the developmental level of the clients. The excessive number of clients

on ground consistency diets is highly questionable."

Saperstein said a list of the deficiencies was sent to the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), which operates SIDC. OMRDD has prepared a plan of correction, which is to be submitted to Saperstein's office by next week.

"We'll be taking a very close look at that plan," Saperstein said. "We want to insure that there will be responsible corrections with specific benchmarks and reasonable time commitments."

Lou Gannon, spokesman for OMRDD, said about two-thirds of the corrections have already been made. "We're concerned about the same types of problems (as those mentioned in the report)," Gannon said. "The plan of correction reflects an ongoing process of improving things."

If corrections are not made, Saperstein said, the federal government could stop its 50 percent reimbursement of Medicaid funds for SIDC patients. "But the key is not to pull federal dollars — we don't want to run away from this thing," Saperstein said. "We want to encourage compliance."

This was the first federal survey of SIDC in several years, Saperstein said. SIDC is certified for Medicaid by the state Health Department, which does annual audits.

This year, the federal agency decided to intensify monitoring of institutions for the retarded, Saperstein said, and audited six state developmental centers, including SIDC.

Four of the institutions — SIDC, Letchworth Village in

Westchester, Newark Developmental Center near Rochester and J.N. Adams Developmental Center south of Buffalo — were cited for serious deficiencies and an "unacceptable" level of care, according to Saperstein.

He said the four institutions had many of the same problems. "I think the state was aware of many of the deficiencies we cited," he added. "I think there is a new commitment toward resolving many of those problems."

Saperstein said that the state is moving clients from SIDC to community residences. There are plans to close the institution by the end of 1987. "But we expect problems to be addressed in the interim, as long as there are patients there; as long as federal dollars are going in there," he said.

Gannon did not deny that the institution still had problems. But he noted that the audit by the Office of the Special Master in May was more positive than the federal survey performed in February — a sign, Gannon said, that things are improving. "We are trying to satisfy the deficiencies that were noted," he said.

Saperstein concluded: "I really do want to be fair about the gains SIDC has made since the mid-1970s. You're talking about dramatic improvements. But they still have the same physical plant. There are still problems with maintenance, with the environment.

"You're not talking about the totally unacceptable conditions of 10 years ago. What we're saying is that the state has not achieved maximum improvements yet."