

Staten Island

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Sees center woes ending

By MARY ENGELS

"By the end of the year, the problems cited by the state and federal reports will have been addressed," James Walsh, executive director of the Staten Island Developmental Center (formerly Willowbrook State Hospital) told the Daily News yesterday.

On Tuesday, Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret Heckler charged that conditions were "appalling" at state-run institutions around the country, including the one on Staten Island.

The center is faced with a possible loss of Medicaid payments if it fails to correct the more than 125 reported deficiencies noted by the federal government.

Said Walsh: "I don't believe that any of the violations cited are life-threatening or that they are a violation that would cause decertification."

THE DIRECTOR said the report released Tuesday in Washington "is six months after the fact."

"The state visited the place last December, and the federal government came in in February," Walsh said. "We have been working on a plan of correction for the past few months which is two-thirds completed and which we hope to have completely addressed by the end of the year."

He said the plan was submitted to the state Depart-

ment of Health two weeks ago and, "with minor modifications, was accepted this past Monday."

"The most important thing in the survey was that, in all areas of deficiencies, they cited none that was in the area of being life-threatening or any fire violations," Walsh stated.

SPECIFICALLY, HE said, the reports had centered on four areas including "food management, nutrition and physical environment, physical and occupational therapy and comfort and privacy."

"Of those four areas," the director said, "there is a special master order from the federal court in which they noted that 'the physical environment has improved dramatically and that the place is far cleaner than ever before.'"

"Given a building complex that is 50 years old and no capital improvements in the plans and a phasedown situation at the place, we felt that was a good evaluation."

Walsh continued: "The main area we still have some problems with is in the

nutritional services, due to a wide variety of reasons. These include the physical layout of the kitchen in a building which is 50 years old.

"We are short-handed, but we recently hired two dieticians and hope to hire more by September, when some schools graduate and we will be able to recruit," Walsh said.



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James Walsh, Staten Island Developmental Center director, with staffer Betty Scarlett and a patient.

"**WE DO** not have enough physical therapists, however, due to the salary and type of clients," he added. "It is a statewide problem, not unique to our center."

Since the survey, Walsh said, the center had increased the number of physical therapists by 150%.

As for the comfort and privacy demerits, Walsh said that is "what happens in the real world when you have a number of clients, who are profoundly retarded, not toilet-trained, and when they have accidents, it is incumbent upon the staff to see that they are cleaned as soon as possible."

"**NOW, THEY** are technically supposed to get the client as fast as possible to a private bathroom and change them. This cannot always be the case. They address the issue immediately in some instances, and this may mean in front of others."

"It's wrong, but they are addressing the issue immediately. Given the size and the physical structure of the place, there will always be some form of complaint, not that we are not doing something, but that on any given day, something can go wrong. It's a large institution."

"The main issue here is we are now providing more services than ever before, but as a result, the more you do, the more that is expected of you."

WALSH SAID he felt the reports "were more discouraging to the staff than myself."

"I think they are doing an excellent job, given the circumstances. They know we are phasing down, and they are also trying to provide community services, as well."

The population of the center is now 800. By March 1985, Walsh said, the number should be 534.