

Clinic's troubles no surprise to area

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ADVANCE STAFF WRITERS

The federal government's threat to close down Beth Israel Medical Center's methadone clinic in Stapleton after an undercover probe found clients were selling the drug outside the center, came as no surprise yesterday to area residents and community officials.

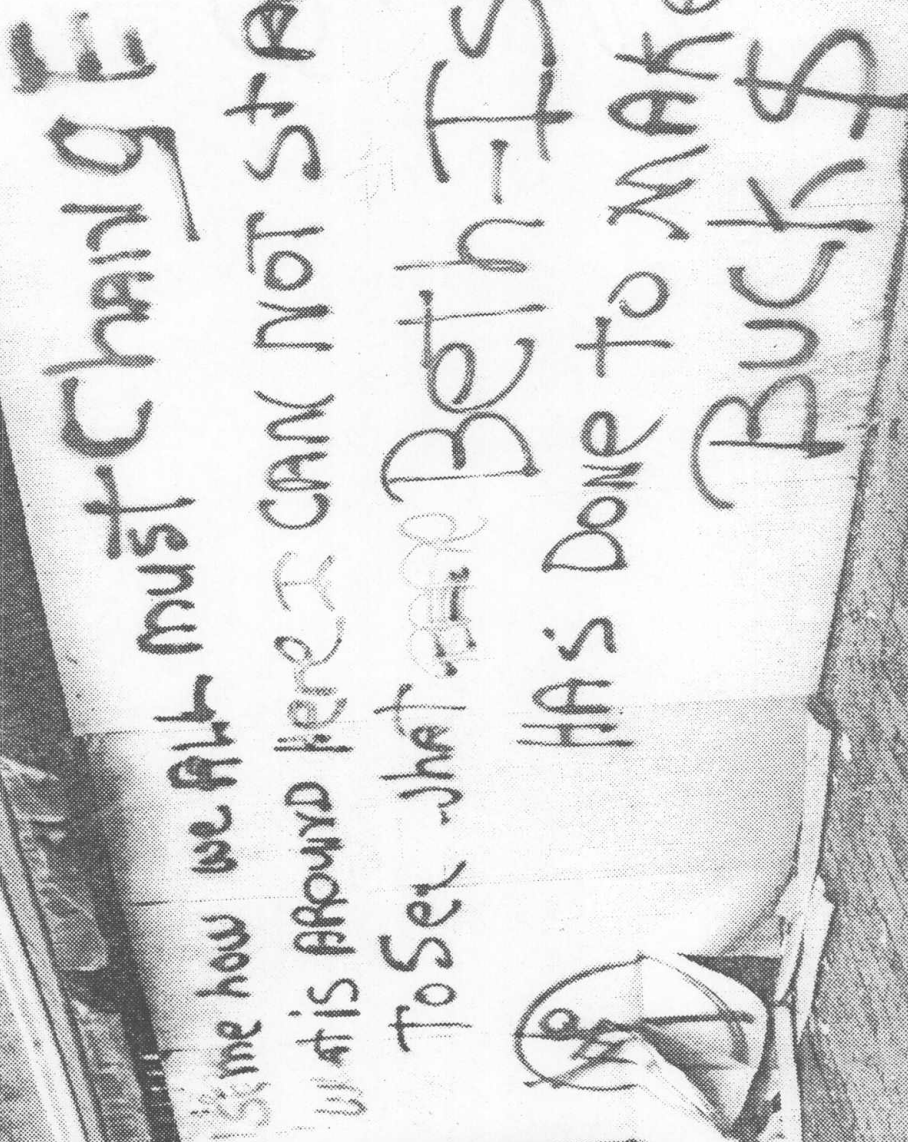
But those in the program said the clinic must stay open for the majority of the clients who are trying to get off drugs.

Community Board 1 officials say the problem has existed for years, but repeated requests to Beth Israel officials to stop the black market sale of methadone outside the clinic have proven fruitless.

"We've been trying to get Beth Israel to do something about this problem for years," said Joseph Marotta, chairman of Community Board 1. "The problem creates a dangerous situation for residents and is ruining the quality of life in the neighborhood."

On Thursday federal Drug Enforcement Administration agents issued a "show-cause" order to Beth Israel, saying the center was improperly dispensing medication and was aware of a methadone-for-profit scam by clients.

The DEA said because of lax control by the clinic, many patients had begun selling doses of



Same how we felt
What is around here I CAN NOT STAY
To see what ~~see~~ Beth-Israhel
HAS DONE TO MAKE A
BUCK \$

Graffiti on an abandoned building near the methadone clinic indicate how the neighborhood feels.

Clinic

(From Page A 1)

methadone nearby and using the money to buy other drugs.

This is the first time federal drug enforcement agents have taken action against one of Beth Israel's 23 clinics in the program's 25-year existence.

Beth Israel has 30 days to respond to the charges. The clinic will remain open pending a hearing.

Stapleton resident Sarah Pederson said the clients loiter in the area and create a scene. "It's frightening, and there is no reason why we should have to put up with it," she said.

Despite the neighborhood's fears, the clients say without the program, everyone would suffer.

"That program kept me out of jail," said Ronnie, 51, a Stapleton resident who was on the methadone program for nine years. "I worked for nine years while I was on the program. Before I got on the program I couldn't work for nine minutes."

"That program is about living and dying. Without it, a lot of people would be dying. That program saved my life."

Clients said yesterday they knew methadone was being sold by several people in the program, but said it was just a few who were breaking the rules.

"So just a few are gonna make it bad for everyone," said one Stapleton man who holds a steady job and is on the program. "Everyone shouldn't suffer for a few people. We have to have this clinic. If this closes it will be a real hardship."

Despite the knowledge that it's just a few people, Marotta said she has that she's abusing the meth-

adone program have brought the quality of life in the Stapleton-Tompkinsville area from "100 to 0."

"People are afraid to walk the streets, the drug users are stealing from the shops, harassing people on the street and blocking them on the sidewalks," he said. "This is no way for Staten Islanders to live just because Beth Israel is not doing its job."

Most business owners along Water and Broad streets agreed drug abusers attracted to the area by the methadone treatment program pose a threat to their livelihood.

Although many of the clinic's patients agreed that some are causing problems, they say it will get worse if the clinic is closed.

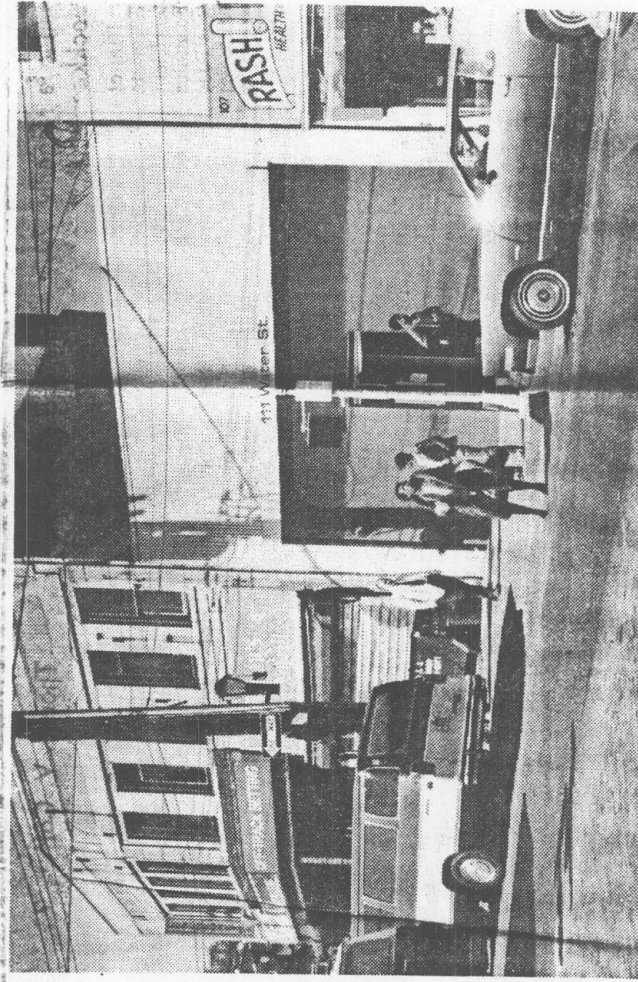
"If they close that clinic, there's going to be a war," said Jerome Spann, a Stapleton resident who said many of his friends are on the program.

"How could they just close the place and leave all those people strung out? If they close that, people are going to start buying dope, and for that they need money and they will start stealing to get money to buy it."

Additionally, they said many of the clinic's patients hold down jobs and stop by every morning on their way to work. They said if the clinic was closed, many workers would face a real hardship in their efforts to recover from drug addiction.

They also said for many methadone patients, their choice is the program or jail. They said heroin addicts who are arrested are often put on a methadone program, or kept in jail. If the center is closed, some clients will wind up behind bars.

Staff writer Thomas Checchi contributed to this story.



The methadone clinic is on Water Street near Tappan Park.

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Page 2 of 2