

Proposed Cuts to Coney Island Hospital Drug Treatment Program Sparks Outrage

By Craig McGuire

A proposed staff cut to a longstanding drug abuse treatment program at Coney Island Hospital led to a protest outside the hospital.

Approximately 75 Comprehensive Drug Abuse Treatment Program (CDATP) clients, counselors, and supporters protested that the cut will decimate the program, which has aided drug addicts for 21 years.

The medically supervised out-patient substance abuse program, is the only one of its kind in this end of Brooklyn.

Contract negotiations between the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS), who allocates the state funding, and Health and Hospital Corporation, the parent entity of Coney Island Hospital, are deadlocked.

Program May Die June 30

Adell Landesberg, associate director of the Department of Psychiatry at the hospital, said, "At this point the entire program is in jeopardy. We are involved in close contract negotiations with OASAS since the beginning of the fiscal year to resolve disagreements over the number of patients that are treated, and the amount of staff to treat those patients."

According to Landesberg, "If negotiations are not resolved by the end of the fiscal year on June 30, we will have to close down."

Dick Chady, a spokesman for OASAS, said the program is being "restructured" because it has been "underutilized."

According to Chady, the program is operating at 70 percent of its licensed capacity of 275 patients, while similar programs operate at 80 percent.

According to Landesberg, the program seeks to provide service for 200 patients at any given time, requiring a staff of 21, which includes counselors and ad-

Local legislators have joined in the protest. "I'm here to show my support," said City Councilman Howard Lasher, who was on hand. "These people are looking for a chance to restore their lives, and this may be the only way."

"Closing this program is senseless and not cost-effective," noted Lasher, "because the community will have to pay more for the damage that the drug addicts will do to the community. Programs like these should be expanded, not cut."

According to Assemblyman Jules Polonetsky, a request to save the program was included in a joint letter with Lasher written to Mayor Rudolph Giuliani concerning hospital privatization.

"It's disappointing that such a successful program, that has performed consistently and received such high marks over the years, is being cut," said Polonetsky. "Of course there is no profit in a program like this, but the true benefit to the community down the line is enormous."

Annette Karlson, a registered nurse in the program who helped organize the rally, said, "Once this program closes, what chance will the thousands of addicts who need this services have of ever leading productive lives?"

Allan Katz, a counselor

in the program for the past five years, said, "This is a personal and community tragedy. The entire community benefits by each addict who gets clean."

"Living Proof"

Of Program's Success

John S., an organizer of the rally, said, "The cuts proposed will reduce service and give the addict too much time on his hands."

A former addict who served a five-year prison sentence, John S has been sober for 18 months, has gotten a job, and enrolled in school. He attributes it all to the program.

"If I had come in for service under the proposed schedule, I never would have been able to do it," said John S. "I'm living proof, and this rally is living proof that these people can be reached."

A drug-free treatment plan, CDATP does not employ the use of methadone like many of its counterparts do.

"The city is spending millions of dollars on detoxing addicts with secondary drugs like methadone, and cutting an effective program like this one," said another client, who wished to be identified only as Charlie-boy.

This is not the first time that CDATP has had state funding reduced by OASAS. In the last three years,

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