

Blackout on Medical Center Inspection

By David Zinman

Newsday Science Writer

Fast Meadow—The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals will begin a three-day inspection of the Nassau County Medical Center on Monday, and under a new policy the public can meet the survey team to express pertinent concerns and complaints.

But a publicity blackout of the inspection tour and bureaucratic red tape may mean there will be little public participation. "I learned of the inspection only by accident," said Joan Saltzman of Community Advocates Inc., a health-oriented consumer group. "I have heard nothing from the center."

After declining yesterday morning to set a time and place for a public meeting, Dr. James F. Collins, medical center superintendent, said through a spokesman last night that the public would be heard at 9 AM Monday in the center's activity building.

But a request to be heard must be made, by letter or telegram, and received by the commission at 875 North Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill., 60611, before the start of the survey. A spokesman for the commission said a year-old policy allows patients and community oriented groups to appear before the team.

The medical center, Nassau's public hospital, has not released any information to the public about the survey dates or the commission's policy permitting public interviews. The commission notifies hospitals six weeks in advance of its inspection.

Collins declined to answer questions directly about the medical center's failure to announce the inspection. Replying through a public-relations spokesman, Collins said the commission does not require hospitals to publish information on survey dates.

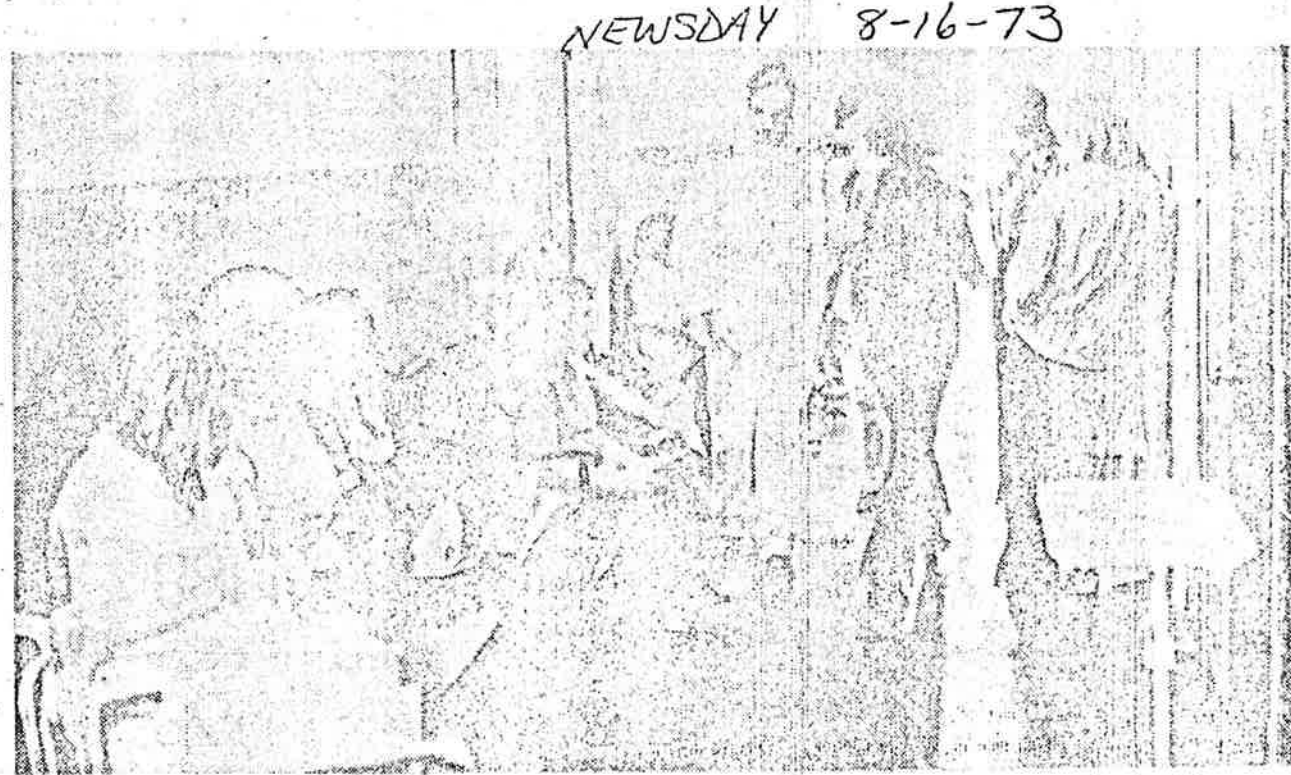
The center's spokesman said the center had received one request so far, from Community Advocates Inc. Asked how the public was supposed to know about its right to participate in the survey if no public

announcement had been made, the spokesman said the hospital is required only to give information about the inspection to those requesting it.

Accreditation by the commission, a private group specializing in evaluating hospitals, is voluntary. Hospitals undergo inspection as a self-check to learn how close its medical programs come to optimum standards. Also, hospitals with teaching programs, such as

Nassau's medical center, must be accredited to be able to continue their intern and residency training.

The Nassau County Medical Center was last evaluated in 1963 and got a three-year accreditation. Although that accreditation expired in 1971, the commission has allowed the center to retain accreditation because a heavy inspection schedule has prevented it from resurveying the center until now.



Patients wait in a hallway in the center. The hospital will be inspected for accreditation, but consumer groups, who have a right to participate, were not advised.

Newsday Photo by Dick Yoncoski