

Consumer Tours Hospital

By Marilyn Goldstein

Manhasset—An agreement by North Shore University Hospital yesterday to allow a consumer representative to accompany a hospital accreditation team on its two-day inspection tour was hailed as "a major breakthrough" by medical consumerists.

The agreement was reached at the start of a public hearing that preceded the tour by Carl D. Rinker and Dr. Nicholas Hoffman of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals. Several consumer groups had requested the representative, and the hospital's executive vice president, Dennis Buckley, agreed immediately. Harriet Buchwalter of Sea Cliff, a member of the Port Washington Health Council, was chosen by the group to accompany the tour. No other Long Island hospital has allowed consumers to accompany an accreditation team.

Mrs. Buchwalter said the inspection would be valuable only if consumers are eventually allowed to participate in the hospital's decision-making pro-

cesses. "This is just a first step," she said. "I think it's only worthwhile if consumers are represented on the hospital's executive board of trustees. The way it is now, you can never really look at what makes the hospital run."

The commission is a private agency that inspects only at a hospital's request. However, a hospital has to be accredited to receive Medicare and Blue Cross funds. The public meeting was instituted recently by the joint commission. A similar hearing was held this summer at Nassau County Medical Center.

Although many consumers voiced complaints about the North Shore's service, John Haynes of Community Advocates said they were "not as much and not as serious" as charges against the county hospital. He said the attitude at North Shore, a voluntary hospital, was also more cooperative than the consumer groups found at the county facility.

The major complaints were raised by the Port Washington Health Council,

which criticized an increase in the minimum clinic fee from \$3 to \$5, the need for an appointment to receive clinic treatment, the lack of a full-scale dental clinic and what they said was "harassment, slip-ups and high-pressure collection methods" in the billing department. Several consumer representatives praised the North Shore's activities, especially its mental health services.

The commission representatives said they could not comment on the complaints, but Buckley said some are justified. "I have to be some kind of a nut to say this hospital is perfect," he said.

Edward Smith, a spokesman for the Nassau County Medical Center, when told of the North Shore decision to allow a consumer on the inspection tour, said, "We'd consider such a thing." He said he suspected there is less rancor toward North Shore because "there's less focus and attention on a proprietary hospital as opposed to a public hospital."