

# Newsday / THE ISLAND

## Criticism of Medical Center Report

By David Zinman

Newsday Science Writer

Consumer representatives have attacked an accreditation team's report on the Nassau County Medical Center because they say it omitted or glossed over major problems, including some that consumers themselves had brought up.

The report by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals, made public Wednesday, listed 49 deficiencies at the county center and gave the hospital a provisional one-year accreditation. Nevertheless, the report made no comment on some complaints consumers called to the attention of the inspection team at a public meeting last August, including allegations of job discrimination against blacks.

The report also said nothing about the center's controversial open-heart surgery program. It did not deal with the complaint that hospital users do not serve on the center's policy-making board of managers. And it barely mentioned problems within the psychiatry department, which has lost all state aid because state health officials, after a survey of the department and years of complaints, rated it substandard.

"I can't understand why two independent agencies could come up with two dissimilar findings [about the psychiatric service]," said Edward Gluckman, executive vice president of the Consumer Commission on Accreditation of Health Service. "It would indicate that someone on the commission overlooked something." Gluckman's non-profit New York City-based group seeks to involve consumers in hospital programs.

Joan Saltzman of Community Advocates, a

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—Edward Gluckman, consumer representative

health-oriented consumer group, said the disparity in the two reports raised questions about whether the commission's inspection was "superficial." She said she was shocked that the commission had not had a psychiatrist on the team to look at the department. Some consumers have been critical of the commission, which is a private group, because it is funded by the American Medical Association and the American Hospital Association.

Mrs. Saltzman said she had written to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare requesting an appointment next month to discuss the survey. Under a new federal law, consumer groups have the right to ask the secretary of health, education and welfare to resurvey a hospital, using federal inspectors, if there is a substantial complaint of a condition relating to patient health and safety. They also have the right to ask the commission to inspect again. Mrs. Saltzman said her group has not decided if it will make a resurvey request.

Responding to the charges, Nora C. O'Malley, the commission's associate director, said inspectors may have not been overly critical of the psychiatry department because it is moving into new facilities soon. She was unable to say how the move would solve problems state officials have underscored, such as

"dangerous understaffing," poor clinical records and lack of staff control.

Regarding a complaint that blacks working at the center are relegated to low-entry jobs and have little chance for advancement, Mrs. O'Malley said inspectors found that no formal discrimination charges had been filed with the personnel department. Lorenzo Merritt of Community Organizations Services, who had raised the issue, said he felt the inspectors had failed to probe his complaint in depth. That indicated he said that the commission was not really interested in fair-employment practices.

As to the lack of consumers on the center's board, Mrs. O'Malley said, this was not listed as a deficiency because inspectors had been told an advisory consumer board was being planned. Last week, it was reported County Executive Caso was expected to appoint two consumers to the center's regular board.

Inspectors also were given newspaper articles reporting that the center did only 19 open-heart operations last year, far fewer than the 200 to 300 a national group says are necessary for optimum proficiency and cost effectiveness. Mrs. O'Malley said the inspection team is not allowed to comment on quality of medical care. It can only see if the hospital has the proper mechanisms, such as evaluation committees to monitor itself.