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Discord continues

By Sam Newlund
Staff Writer

Time is running out on the efforts of interest groups to reach consensus on the future of Minnesota's state hospital system.

Negotiators met for the 11th time Wednesday and continued to disagree on details of a new system for 1,300 people now housed in 10 state institutions. For example:

* An advocate group still angrily denounced the proposed transfer, of nearly all retarded residents of the centers into small group homes,

The result will be "a colossal failure with catastrophic results," said Melvin Heckt, state president of the Congress of Advocates for the Mentally Retarded. It will include "unnecessary suffering, loss of life, rape and other sexual and physical abuse, neglect" and "Siberialikc transfers, he charged.

* Union representatives still were frustrated by not knowing how many jobs will be lost if the Department of Human Services succeeds in shrinking some centers and nearly eliminating others.

"don't think the unions can agree unless we have an idea that (employees') needs are going to be met," said Jane Richey, negotiator for the Minnesota Association of Professional Employees.

* Most affected cities still wanted some programs for the retarded left in the hospitals, now called regional centers. They wanted the centers to be headquarters for the consultative services that state human services professionals would provide to outlying community homes under the department's plan.

"We're tired of always having decisionmaking coming out of St. Paul," said Helen Hoffman, community spokeswoman for Faribault.

The negotiators' last scheduled meeting will be held Wednesday, although the department said a fine-tuning session might be called in early January. The goal has been to reach agreement that could be folded into the department's budget before it is submitted to the Department of Finance and Gov. Rudy Perpich. Perpich's version of the state budget will go to the 1989 Legislature, which will convene Jan. 3.

All of Human Service's budget proposal has been submitted except the regional-center portion, state Budget Director Brian Roherty said yesterday. The deadline for all departments is Tuesday, but Human Services was given an extension for the regional center items until sometime in December, he said.

The eight regional centers serve the mentally ill, retarded and chemically dependent in various combinations. Two state nursing homes house elderly patients. The department's proposal contains few changes for the chemically dependent.

Its revised plan does call for

* At Cambridge, phasing out the retarded-only regional center, leaving the campus for other public use's, including a community college.

* Phasing out programs for the retarded at regional centers in Wilmar, Fergus Falls, Moose Lake and Brainerd.

* At Faribault, phasing out the retarded-only regional center, except for 120 nursing home beds.

* At St. Peter, phasing out the program for the retarded, except for 35

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patients who are both retarded and mentally ill.

* For the retarded, 85 new state-operated group homes and 44 new state-operated day programs.

* New state-operated community facilities for 150 mentally ill people.

* Building a new Twin Cities area psychiatric hospital to replace the regional center at Anoka. Renovating or rebuilding the centers at Fergus Falls and Moose Lake. Expanding the Security Hospital at St. Peter.

E2 Closing Oak Terrace Nursing Home in Minnetonka and moving patients to regional centers and other locations.

Beverly Jones Heydinger, chief department negotiator, said the short time left for submitting a budget and drafting legislation means that the department must go ahead with its

proposal, whether or not consensus is reached.

A new draft of the department plan, distributed yesterday, responds to criticism last week by a group of six mental health organizations. They said the department wants to keep too many mentally ill patients in institutions, and they objected to new construction without a thorough assessment of individual patient needs.

The phrase, "a continuum of care based on assessment of individual needs," and a number of similar references were added to the new version.

Heckt's group called for a five-year moratorium on discharges of retarded people from regional centers and a freeze on the current staff complement. The group has long argued that the centers give excellent care and that no one should be forced to move unless the family requests it.