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DRUG REHAB PATIENTS QUIZZED

**BYLINE:** Duane Stoltzfus, Record Staff Writer

**BODY:**

Members of the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office on Tuesday questioned dozens of patients at KIDS of North Jersey, a controversial drug treatment program for children and young adults.

Donald Hanson, chairman of KIDS' board of directors, said more than 20 county officials descended on the program's Hackensack headquarters around noon.

Authorities interviewed patients at the center and returned to county offices with at least a dozen patients to continue the interviews, said Hanson.

Bob Moss, finance and administration director for KIDS, said he believes a parent or patient complained to the Prosecutor's Office that clients 18 years or older were being kept against their will unlawfully.

"This is part of an ongoing witch hunt on the part of the Prosecutor's Office and DYFS the state Division of Youth and Family Services," Moss charged. "I think this is based on allegations of troubled kids who resisted treatment."

Prosecutor John J. Fahy would not comment. He declined to say whether an investigation was under way or why members of his staff interviewed patients at the private, not-for-profit organization.

KIDS, which also handles clients suffering from alcohol abuse and eating disorders, is treating about 120 patients, nearly a third of whom are from Canada.

Moss said he was not aware of any patients 18 years or older being held against their will. He said patients know the procedure for quitting the program.

"I was concerned they were taking these kids, some of whom are suicidal," Moss said late in the afternoon. "It's dangerous to put them back on the street."

The Prosecutor's Office assured Moss the patients would not be left out on the street, Moss said. By 7 p.m., at least one of the patients taken away for interviewing had returned, he said.

A year ago, at a public hearing called in connection with KIDS' application for a license, the Prosecutor's Office said former clients complained of physical mistreatment.

The Prosecutor's Office said the complaints were not indictable offenses and would best be addressed by the state Department of Health through a licensing mechanism. The center's license application is still pending.

**Miller Newton**, the ordained minister and anthropologist who founded KIDS in 1984, has said accusations leveled against KIDS are groundless.

Newton could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

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