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— Lucy Hadi, HRS district administrator

Straight Inc.'s license extended

■ *Straight Inc. is a drug treatment program in Pinellas County that uses peer pressure and behavioral modification techniques on juveniles 12 to 18 years old. In recent months it has been under investigation by state health and administrative officials.* ■

By **WILLIAM NOTTINGHAM**
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Straight Inc.'s temporary operating license was again extended up to 90 days Tuesday while state officials reaffirm that program clients know their legal rights.

Once two sections of policy are revised, the drug program probably will have its full one-year license restored.

THE LICENSE restoration could occur within the next 30 to 45 days, said an official with the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS).

That would effectively end HRS's four-month investigation into Straight, which has been operating under a temporary license for the last 90 days. But questions of impropriety — including possible criminal misconduct — continue to hang over the drug program.

Others investigating Straight are Pinellas-Pasco State Atty. James T. Russell and state officials responsible

for a \$50,000 federal grant to the program.

"They (the questions) are ones dealing with the prior period (before HRS began its investigation)," explained Lucy Hadi, acting District 5 administrator. "Licensing (HRS's responsibility) has to deal with the current period."

"We're not viewing past sins relative to this license," she said. "We can't under the law."

In a letter Monday to Melvin F. Sembler, Straight's board president, Ms. Hadi wrote that the program is "in compliance with all but two items" in an 18-point monitoring plan drawn up by HRS in February.

THAT'S WHEN HRS found that some Straight clients may have been illegally held in the drug program against their will. Straight since has told HRS that all clients — except those ordered there by judges — can leave whenever they like.

But some clients and their parents apparently don't completely understand how that procedure works, Ms. Hadi said.

Straight also must modify its "strip and search" guidelines, Ms. Hadi said.

When a client enters the program, he is ordered to disrobe so counselors can search him for smuggled drugs. Straight's policy does not explain what

counselors would do if a client exercised his legal right to resist the search.

Straight's "treatment planning process" also fails to conform with state regulations, Ms. Hadi said, and should be modified so clients have well-defined treatment goals.

In the letter, Ms. Hadi praised "the strides made by Straight Inc. during the past ninety days."

Because of the program's complex behavioral modification techniques, she said, Straight's professional advisory board of psychologists should be more involved in treatment practices. HRS regulations merely require that a drug program HAVE a professional advisory board, she said.

Sembler, asked about the program's second temporary license, said, "We're not happy about it." But he added, "I'm sure we'll have full licensure."

MS. HADI said some of Straight's operating problems occurred because HRS failed to provide the program with adequate "technical assistance."

As a result, she said, HRS has beefed up its drug-abuse licensing committee from seven to 11 persons and is revising its monitoring methods.

"We have learned a lot through this process (of investigating Straight)," she said.