

Program granted license

Straight Inc. center had been on probation

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PINELLAS PARK — State officials granted Straight Inc. a one-year license Wednesday after the drug and alcohol treatment facility agreed patients would not be used to restrain other patients and ensured unlimited access to an abuse hot line.

In June, the state Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS) issued the facility a three-month probationary license after learning that teen-age patients were being used to overpower and restrain others. HRS inspectors also criticized Straight for restricting bathroom privileges and keeping incomplete clinical records.

The new license was issued Wednesday after a series of meetings between HRS and Straight officials and a reinspection of the Pinellas Park facility.

"The program is clear on what it is expected to do," said Linda Lewis, deputy assistant secretary of the HRS alcohol and drug abuse program in Tallahassee. "The whole point here was to make sure we have the best program we can have."

Page Peary, director of operations for Straight centers nationwide, said all the concerns HRS cited have been resolved.

"They taught us clearly what their policies are and we taught them something about our drug treatment," Peary said. "Our relationship with HRS has never been better. There is no area of conflict now."

In June, HRS officials issued the Straight facilities in Pinellas Park

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and in Orlando three-month probationary licenses after finding nearly identical problems at both centers, Lewis said. Both facilities made changes in policy to appease state health officials, she said.

The Orlando Straight center was granted a one-year operating license last week, Lewis said.

The centers revised policy to ensure that:

■ Only trained adult staff members will be allowed to restrain patients who are a danger to themselves or others.

■ All incidents involving the restraint of a patient will be reviewed by a staff nurse and authorized by a

staff doctor within the hour if occurred.

■ Patients have the right to report abuse without staff permission and have 24-hour access to a telephone to call the HRS abuse hot line.

Peary said patients had been used to restrain other patients only in cases of "self-defense." He also said staff members under the age of 18 had been used to restrain problem patients and that both practices will be discontinued.

Straight's policy on restraint was mandated by a new licensing regulations adopted by HRS in August that addresses the use of restraint and seclusion at drug treatment facilities throughout Florida.

The regulations state that pa-

tients cannot restrain other patients, that restraint and seclusion cannot be used as punishment and that each incident requiring the measures must be justified and documented.

"We're in absolute compliance with that," Peary said.

However, incidents of Straight patients having their bathroom privileges restricted or being watched while they use the toilet or shower continue, according to an Aug. 22 HRS site visit report. Those practices were criticized and ordered changed last June by Bob Holm, of the HRS Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Program Office in St. Petersburg.

Peary said such stringent measures are necessary to make sure patients don't hide drug use or attempt to harm themselves. Peary also said that HRS officials agreed during recent discussions that such actions are acceptable.