

ROUGH GOING FOR KIDS CLINIC

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Miller Newton, an anthropologist and author who launched a nationwide chain of drug treatment centers from his Hackensack office, is presiding over a dwindling and troubled program.

Bergen County authorities this week interviewed dozens of patients from KIDS of North Jersey, apparently after hearing allegations that patients were illegally being held against their will. KIDS officials denied the allegations.

The action by the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office comes a few weeks after Canadian health officials cut off funding for nearly 40 patients enrolled in the Hackensack program.

This summer, the last of three out-of-state programs affiliated with KIDS closed, and plans to open a new treatment center in Canada fell through.

The Alberta Department of Health in July stopped paying \$25 a day for each of the patients from the Canadian province who were being treated in Hackensack, Larry McLennan, a department spokesman, said.

"We will pay for out-of-country medical care provided by a physician or a psychiatrist," he said. "Our understanding is that KIDS does not employ a psychiatrist. "

To date, the Canadian government has paid KIDS about \$250,000, McLennan said. He said the government is reviewing the operations in Hackensack to decide whether payments should resume.

The private, not-for-profit center believes peer pressure is essential in treating drug abuse. The program relies heavily on marathon "rap sessions" led by its graduates.

It could not be determined Wednesday whether KIDS currently employs a psychiatrist. Newton, the president and clinical director of KIDS, and Bob Moss, finance and administration director, did not return phone calls.

Hackensack is the home base for two operations, both led by Newton. KIDS of North Jersey provides treatment for about 120 patients. KIDS Centers of America is the parent agency for affiliate programs.

Back in 1986, Newton planned to have KIDS Centers of America supervise a national chain of 10 to 25 local organizations. But the three affiliated centers that were started ran into difficulties, and all have closed.

This summer, KIDS of Greater Salt Lake a Utah affiliate closed down after state officials revoked its license. Last year, KIDS of El Paso County in Texas went bankrupt, and KIDS of Southern California shut down.

In all three locations, KIDS struggled with licensing amid allegations that patients were mistreated and unlawfully detained.

Newton has said the program's critics are unfair and misguided.

KIDS Centers portrayed the Utah affiliate as a program that reached maturity under the national center's tutelage and reopened as Lifeline Inc., ready to serve as an independent treatment facility.

But Ken Stettler, licensing specialist with Utah's Department of Human Services, said Lifeline is a "completely different" program with new directors and policies. The KIDS chapter had failed to meet licensing conditions including a requirement to hire more professionals, he said.

"In three weeks time, the attitude there has changed," Stettler said. "The kids feel like they have a better line to the director, and they don't feel like they are being led by peer staff. "

With the closing of the Utah affiliate, KIDS of North Jersey is the only remaining center. Plans to open a branch center in Alberta fell through this summer.

Meanwhile, those who direct the Hackensack program lashed out at the Prosecutor's Office for sending a group they numbered at more than 20 to interview patients on Tuesday, and then taking away more than a dozen patients.

Moss has denied that any patients were illegally being held against their will.

Donald Hanson, chairman of KIDS board of directors, accused Prosecutor John J. Fahy of heavy-handed treatment. "Do we still live in the United States? " Hanson asked.

Fahy declined to comment on the program and the measures taken by his office.

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