



Pennhurst care hit in report

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An investigation into more than 40 deaths at the Pennhurst Center for the Mentally Retarded in Spring City, Chester County, has disclosed that many of the deaths could have been prevented.

The results of the investigation, released yesterday, centers around residents and former residents of the center who have died during the past two years. It says Pennhurst clients receive inadequate medical care and are often exposed to life-threatening conditions.

The two physicians who conducted the probe and wrote the report, Drs. James D. Clements and John W. Cooledge, were hired by the special master's office, an agency appointed by U.S. District Judge Raymond J. Broderick.

As an example, the report outlined the problem of a man who died in January 1979 after strangling on a sock. According to the report, the man had passed a sock in his stool several days earlier.

"The medical response to this episode consisted of an order for the man to wear muffs (restraint mittens). But no evidence could be found the use of muffs were monitored, nor that the man's behavior had abated," said the report.

In addition, the report said residents do not receive periodic comprehensive assessment of their condition, their progress, and their long- and short-term medical needs.

Clements, a national expert on medical care for the retarded, and Cooledge, medical director of the Georgia Retardation Center, spent two days at the center last month.

They were hired after lawyer David Ferleger, in March, asked for an investigation into 36 deaths at Pennhurst since March 1978. Ferleger sought the probe when Broderick issued his order to place the residents in the community. There have been several deaths at Pennhurst since then.

Broderick also ordered the state to provide adequate medical care and not to overmedicate the residents.

In light of the report, Ferleger is seeking to have Broderick set a hearing and hold Pennhurst and the state Department of Public Welfare in criminal and civil contempt of court since medical care was ordered in the March 1978 decision.

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