

Chicago Board of Health Calls Nurse Home Staffs to Account

BY PAMELA ZEKMAN

Employes and operators of six nursing homes were summoned for questioning by Chicago Board of Health officials in closed door hearings which began yesterday into nursing home abuses witnessed by TRIBUNE Task Force reporters and Better Government Association investigators.

Dr. Murray Brown, city health commissioner said the unusual hearings were instituted after health officials reviewed reports the TRIBUNE reporters and B. G. A. investigators turned over to the health department last week. The reports detailed experiences of investigators who worked in more than 20 homes as nurses' aides, mop boys and maintenance men.

Eye Criminal Charges

Administrators, nurses' aides, licensed practical nurses and other employes were questioned by various health department heads in the presence of a psychiatrist and Assistant State's Atty. Gordon Milner.

Edward King, deputy health commissioner, said the hear-

ings could result in placing charges of unethical practices against employes or administrators with the Illinois Department of Registration and Education for action by the agency's disciplinary committee. Cases of abuse and assault could be brought before a county grand jury for criminal prosecution, King said.

In another development, the United States Senate Select Committee on the Aging is considering a tentative date of April 2 to begin hearings in Chicago on nursing home abuses. The committee, chaired by Sen. Frank Church (D., Idaho), plans to hear testimony from investigators, nursing home representatives and other persons with information on nursing home operations.

The state Senate's Legislative Advisory Committee on Public Assistance will resume hearings in Chicago at 10 a. m. Monday in room 1500 in the State of Illinois Building, 160 N. La Salle St. The committee, chaired by Sen. John W. Carroll (R., Park Ridge), will hear testimony from representatives

of various nursing home associations.

City Sessions Continue

The closed-door sessions at the Board of Health will continue thru next week, Dr. Brown said.

"Any verified case of abuse, assault or unethical practices will be referred to the appropriate agency for action. We are doing everything we can to insure quality care for elderly residents," he said.

Unannounced Visits

Brown also announced that public health nurses have been assigned to make unannounced visits to nursing homes in their districts at least once a week. They are to report conditions in the homes to their supervisors within 24 hours so that corrective action can be taken if warranted, Brown said.

The visits by the 80 public health nurses will serve as a crosscheck for the health department, which will continue to conduct regular monthly inspections of the homes, Brown said.

County Board Chairman George W. Dunne said his staff is already working on proposed

resolutions and ordinances to give the county licensing control over suburban nursing homes. He said these will be introduced when the new state Constitution with its home rule provisions for Cook County becomes effective July 1.

"It is the intention of the County Board to acquire all of the authority and responsibility under the new Constitution that a home rule county can and should have," Dunne said. "That includes the responsibility for nursing homes."

Currently the county has no licensing power.