

# Mental Health Budget Slashed

By DENISE SIEBENTHAL

Sentinel Staff Writer

Those with moderate mental problems will find it almost impossible to get treatment from the county due to cuts in the 1982-83 county Health Services Agency budget.

An \$11.4 million health budget approved by supervisors today simply eliminates funds the Community Mental Health Services division needs to treat the "mildly dysfunctional."

Due to extreme budget cuts being felt by almost all divisions of the Health Services Agency, the Community Mental Health Services division will concentrate what monies it has on those with chronic mental problems.

Despite inflation, the mental health division will be operating with almost \$79,000 less next year than this year and is losing about 19 employees.

Mental Health Director Tim Mullins told supervisors at today's hearing that if the state cuts any more funds for the severely mentally ill, there's a chance the county may have to close its mental health department completely.

Overall, the Health Services Agency is

witnessing an 8 percent decrease in its budget, Agency Director Elinor Hall reported. Most of the \$11.4 million budget comes from the state, with the county contributing around \$1.4 million of its own money.

The county will be spending \$41,000 less of its own money next year on total health services than it did in 1981-82.

These budget decreases mean the agency will be operating with around 32 less employees than it did this year.

The decreases also mean increases in fees for communicable disease treatment and public health lab services, a 10 percent increase in fees for medical services at the Santa Cruz and Watsonville medical clinics, a new \$5 minimum fee charged at both clinics and a revision of the sliding fee scale used at the clinics. There will also be an increase in septic tank inspection fees.

But having to pay more for health services isn't the only impact citizens will feel from the scaled-down health budget. There also will be numerous reductions in the health services residents have been accustomed to, according to Dr. George Wolfe, county health officer and medical director.

While the budget passed by supervisors includes many cuts in services, supervisors asked for reports this Friday on ways to retain the well-baby clinics in outlying areas, on ways to create more funding for the prevention of alcoholism and on ways to cut the costs incurred by the county from persons unable to pay hospital bills.

Concerned over a budget recommendation for well-baby clinics to be moved to one location at the county health facility on Emeline Street (except for the Watsonville clinic), supervisors unanimously reinstated the part-time nurse for the well-baby clinics that had been eliminated from the budget. Supervisor Wayne Moore was absent from the hearing.

The board also asked for reports this Friday on ways to provide "storefront" clinical services in the San Lorenzo Valley and on ways to take care of the backlog of those desiring services through the senior maintenance program.

While the health budget technically has been approved, supervisors still can make changes to it before the final budget is adopted.