

Protecting Data Of Drug Clinics

By Charles Petit

The city Mental Health Advisory Board came out strongly yesterday against federal regulations requiring drug treatment programs to give personal data on patients to a national computer study.

The data could, said board members, be used by law enforcement agencies against the patients, endangering the confidentiality normally given medical records.

In the resolution unanimously adopted opposing the program, the board said it could have a "chilling" effect on treatment.

Carolyn Schuft, a planner with the San Francisco Coordinating Council on Drug Abuse, said computer experts estimate that by interfacing CODAP information with other computer systems, such as a state's vital statistics bureau, the name of a specific drug user could be provided to police agencies "in 30 seconds."

Dr. Barry Decker, the chief of the health department's Division of Special Programs, which operates drug clinics, said the city has so far not complied with the federal rules despite clauses in federal grants

clearly calling for such compliance

"But," he said, "there has been so much opposition to this all over the country that it seems likely the federal government will change the rules before it withdraws grants."

The federal program, which has already sent questionnaires to local drug treatment agencies, is called CODAP, which stands for Client Oriented Data Acquisition Process.

Under it, private and public drug treatment programs getting federal money are required to gather information on patients including birth date, sex, race, zip code, arrest records and employment records.

Put together by the White House Special Action Office for Drug Abuse Programs, the information is to be used to prepare statistical studies of the drug-using population.

Dr. Francis Rigney, chairman of the supervisor-appointed mental health board, called CODAP "disgusting."

He added that the state has similar requirements for methadone programs and San Francisco has not complied with them either for the same reason—to protect the trust our patients have in us."

Tomorrow, said Miss Schuft, two federal representatives will meet with the local coordinating council to discuss complaints against the data gathering system.