

Probe started at von Solbrig

By William Gaines
and Jay Branegan

INVESTIGATIONS INTO von Solbrig Memorial Hospital and two of the doctors who practice there were ordered Monday by city and state agencies in the wake of Tribune disclosures of alleged unsafe and unethical medical practices at the hospital.

The Chicago Board of Health held an emergency hearing Monday morning at which the owner of the hospital, Dr. Charles R. von Solbrig, was ordered to appear. The hearing was requested by Dr. Eric Oldberg, president of the Board

of Health, on the basis of Tribune stories Sunday and Monday that documented routine violations of state hospital licensing codes administered by the city.

Ronald Stackler, director the Illinois Department of Registration and Education, ordered an immediate investigation into the practices of Dr. Edward J. Mirmelli, a physician who performs wholesale, assembly-line tonsillectomies at von Solbrig hospital, 6500 S. Pulaski Rd.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT also announced it was expanding its investigation of malpractice charges against Dr.

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City begins probe into von Solbrig

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von Solbrig to include other allegations made in The Tribune.

"The department intends to thoroly investigate all the allegations made in The Tribune about Dr. von Solbrig, Dr. Mirmelli, and any other licensed medical personnel working there," a spokesman said.

The Department of Registration and Education could ask the state medical licensing committee to revoke a doctor's license.

At the Board of Health hearing at the Civic Center, Dr. von Solbrig denied that a Tribune reporter, working as a janitor in the hospital, had been left alone with an unconscious patient following surgery, as disclosed in The Tribune Sunday.

THOMAS J. COONEY, executive director of hospital administration for the Board of Health, told Dr. von Solbrig to bring in hospital payroll records Tuesday after the doctor's attorney requested that the hearing be continued until then. The next hearing will be held in the Board of Health hearing room, in the Civic Center, at 11 a.m. Tuesday.

Cooney quoted from The Tribune series that Gaines and other janitors were routinely called into the surgery room. "We can check the records. Bring your payroll records in," Cooney told Dr. von Solbrig.

During the Task Force investigation, reporters found patients routinely hospitalized for long stays by Dr. von Solbrig when other doctors had pronounced them healthy.

Public aid families with three to five children were subjected to apparently unnecessary tonsillectomies by Dr. Mir-



Dr. Oldberg



Dr. von Solbrig

melli. Medical experts said the odds are astronomical that an entire family would need their tonsils out at once.

VON SOLBRIG Hospital, Chicago's only for-profit general hospital, lost its accreditation last October from the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Hospitals, a private organization sponsored by the hospitals themselves.

Dr. von Solbrig, sole owner of the hospital, appealed the loss of accreditation, which is accepted by the Illinois Department of Public Health in lieu of a thorough accreditation process of its own.

The JCAH in April upheld its original decision to withdraw accreditation, but the state did not inspect the hospital until late July.

The results of the state inspection have not been compiled or released yet, according to a spokesman for the Public Health Department.