

Fire Hazard Called Threat To Gouverneur's Children

By FELIX KESSLER
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Attendants at Gouverneur Hospital today charged that mentally retarded children were not properly clothed or covered for at the dilapidated institution.

In addition, the 208 severely handicapped children at the Lodge East Side hospital could not be safely evacuated in case of fire, the attendants asserted. They would be impossible for us to get the kids out of all eight wards," one attendant told the World-Telegram.

The 67-year-old abandoned city hospital was pressed into use as a state institution in 1961 to house the overflow of almost 7000 children and adults at the Willowbrook State School on Staten Island.

"For mental retardates," said one employee, "you need a new building."

These allegations were denied in full by Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook and Gouverneur, who asserted that the building was safe and more than adequate for its medical care program.

Denying the employees' contention that there were too few attendants on ward duty, Dr. Hammond said Gouverneur was "one of the most heavily staffed units in the Department of Mental Health."

He described as "quite exaggerated and distorted" the claims that the building was of substandard or constituted a fire hazard.

But one the attendants noted that part of the physical ther-

apy that the children receive consists of placing them on mats lying on the floors.

"If it's cold outside, they have to go on the floor any way," the attendant said. "Even if their hair is wet from the shower."

Floors Unclean

Other attendants said that "you can't keep the floors clean" in the antiquated building because plaster frequently falls from the walls and ceilings.

"And you've got to watch these children to see they don't pick it up and eat it," said one attendant.

The charges were made by staff workers expressing grievances which they say grow out of overwork and a poor relationship with the hos-

pital's administrator, Dr. Hammond. He said that there is no problem of understaffing at Gouverneur, the employees disputed this and said they were overburdened with extra work held at Gouverneur only after particular wards.

He blamed "absenteeism, not a lack of employees," for complaints of understaffing on par-

tenants. There are only two attendants on every ward to lift 26 patients from their beds, he insisted. Referring to demands for more attendants on wards, Dr. Hammond said he was powerless. "That's the way it is," he said. "If people don't come to work, just too much lifting."

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