

INSTITUTION ON S. I. ACTS ON CROWDING

Willowbrook Mental Cases Getting Added Space

By FRANKLIN WHITEHOUSE

The 76 men, clothed in cast-off suits and state-bought khakis, chattered in the dayroom of Ward D, Building 9.

Some sat quietly on the floor smiling vacantly at the two male attendants while a female nurse struggled to get a middle-aged patient out of his Army fatigues on the way to a toilet.

Beyond the toilet area is the 80-by-40-foot dormitory where these inmates of Willowbrook State School for Mental Defectives sleep in white iron cots placed so closely together there is scarcely knee room between.

The number of patients in Ward D has not decreased since last fall when Senator Robert F. Kennedy charged that overcrowded conditions at the Staten Island institution were causing its patients to live "amidst brutality and human excrement and intestinal disease."

"Conditions are far from ideal," Dr. Jack Hammond, the director, said in a recent interview, "but they are already improved from what they had been."

Largest in Nation

He pointed to a broad stretch of raw earth being bulldozed flat between a patient building and a kitchen-dining hall. It was the start of a \$1,340,986 project, financed out of emergency state funds, to move 300 patients from their overcrowded 30-year-old brick buildings into prefabricated temporary quarters.

Ten one-story residences of stainless steel and concrete are to be constructed by August. They are planned to accommo-

date 30 patients each and last for five years, Dr. Hammond said.

Admissions to Willowbrook were severely cut back in October, 1964, three months after Dr. Hammond took over. There are now 5,595 inmates in the country's largest institution for the mentally retarded. It is staffed by 2,475 employes.

Dr. Hammond said there was a waiting list of 732 applicants for admission to the institution, which has a "quite livable" certified capacity of 4,528.

Transfers of patients to other state institutions have been going on steadily for two years. About 200 were sent to Bronx State Hospital during 1964 and 1965, pending another move to the newly opened Suffolk State School at Melville, L.I.

Two hundred more patients were transferred upstate last year to the Sampson division of Willard State Hospital in Seneca County and to the new Sunmount State School in Tupper Lake.

When Senator Kennedy visited Willowbrook the patient census stood at 6,055.

Last October Governor Rockefeller authorized 84 more staff members, including teachers and therapists.

"We've hired about three-quarters of these," Dr. Hammond said. "You don't find 84 people knocking on your door the day after the Governor's announcement appears in the papers."

Despite the Governor's action in October and the emergency funds for the prefabricated dwellings, Dr. Hammond maintains that "Senator Kennedy came along at a time when things were already moving."

"By 1975," Dr. Hammond said "the projection is to get the patient population down to 4,000."

The Kennedy visit, he said, "made the public and the legislators more keenly aware of our needs and more responsive to the demands of the Governor's budget."