

Pediatric News

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Few Parents Willing to Take Back Retarded Child From Institution

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y.—Most parents of inmates in the largest residential facility for the retarded in this country have shown an unwillingness even to consider resumption of the care of these children at home.

When they were specifically invited by mail to seek appointments to discuss the progress of these children, only 10.8% did so.

The parental reluctance points up the need for additional community services, including special classes in public schools, which might enable parents to keep their retarded children out of institutions, according to Dr. Jack Hammond, director of the Willowbrook State School here, and his associates.

A hope to relieve overcrowding at the



Dr. Hammond

state school prompted the survey of parents by mail. At the time of this undertaking, the school housed 5,395 retarded children, adolescents, and adults. Letters to their families elicited only 749 replies—14.7% of the 5,110 letters that were actually delivered. There were 285 letters returned as undeliverable.

Of those who replied, only 552 families filled in the form indicating their willingness to make an appointment to discuss the progress of their son or daughter at the school. Most of these (475) also indicated their willingness to discuss the treatment of the patient.

Only 77 (1.5%), however, expressed willingness to consider removing the patient from the institution and caring for him at home.

Analysis of the 77 responses showed that the parents of 29 females and 48 males would consider possible release. Of the patients, 24 were children, 37 were adolescents, and 16 were adults; 17 were "profoundly or severely retarded," and one was a borderline defective. The other 59 were moderately or mildly retarded. Dr. Hammond and his associates, Manny Sternlicht, Ph.D., and Martin R. Deutsch say (*Hosp. Community Psychiat.* 20: 338-39, 1969).

Ninety-eight of the 283 families who had recently placed infants at Willowbrook expressed interest in an appointment to talk about their infant's progress, but only four indicated willingness to consider caring for the infant at home.

That low number is "portentous," the investigators say, because retarded individuals most need individual attention and loving care in infancy. Without such early care, they will "develop behavior and personality distortions" that may continue throughout their lives.

The intensive medical and nursing care these retarded infants need makes them the heaviest burden for the institution.