

65 student nurses voice concern over Willowbrook school

Sixty-five student nurses faced with the imminent shut-down of their School of Practical Nursing at Willowbrook State School, yesterday made plans to present their plight in Albany.

The students, who say they were informed yesterday at 4:30 p.m. that the school would cease operation as of April 1, are incensed over losing six months of study and are concerned about salaries they say are overdue.

Miss Ermine Braithwaite, a spokesman for the students, explained they "had laid out money for uniforms and books in excess of \$200" in anticipation of being provided with a full year's course in practical nursing.

Miss Braithwaite also revealed that the students who are paid \$200 a month while working at Willowbrook have been paid for March but not for February. She explained that the students have been promised their February checks "next month."

TO MEET AMANN

"Since we are being terminated next month, I don't know what will happen to those checks," she said.

Miss Braithwaite and her companions are planning to travel to Albany Tuesday to meet with Staten Island Assemblyman Edward Amann. Her group will be joined by the registered nursing students from Brooklyn State Hospital, who also will not be permitted to finish their school year.

anyway courses for practical nurses at Willowbrook was scheduled to run 12 months from September. The closing of the Willowbrook facility just about halves the year.

Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook State School, has announced that in addition to the School of Practical Nursing, other school services and procedures will be cut back or phased out because of the \$49.6 million slash in the budget of the State Department of Mental Hygiene for fiscal 1971 proposed by the State Assembly, Ways and Means Committee.

The areas slated for cuts are food, overtime, and various programs for the education and advancement of employes, including the elimination of the high school equivalent program. Dr. Hammond would not speculate on the effect of cuts on his facility, which has a staff of 3,400 caring for 5,220 patients, although he intimated Willowbrook will see the crisis through.

"I must trust in the wisdom and judgment of our elected officials," Dr. Hammond stated. "If we must operate with less funds than we need we will do the best that we can."

SCARE TACTICS

In a related development, Assemblyman Willis H. Stephens, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, has accused Dr. Alan D. Miller, commissioner of the Department of Mental Hygiene, of "scare tactics" to keep the

Earlier this week Dr. Miller charged in a letter to members of the State Legislature that "tragic consequences" would result if the proposed cutbacks are implemented. Six thousand department employes would be laid off and a general deterioration in care for the mentally handicapped would follow, Dr. Miller asserted.

Yesterday Dr. Miller held a news conference in the Hotel Commodore, Manhattan, at which he reiterated what had been set down in his letter to the legislators.

Chairman Willis said he was "shocked" at Dr. Miller's statement that people in state institutions would die "if the economies called for by the Ways and Means Committee were put into effect." He stated that the committee's proposal, which will be voted on by the State Legislature on or about March 31, provides for 64,910 state employes to care for 86,975 patients — a ratio of three staff members to each four patients.

The State Department of Mental Hygiene oversees all psychiatric hospitals and schools for the mentally retarded and partially finances local community mental health boards. The fiscal year begins April 1.