

Willowbrook's 3-year goal

School aims at one-third patient cut

By ELAINE HESS

While most institutions look toward serving more patients, Willowbrook State school works at reducing the number. The aim is to lessen the overcrowding that has existed for years and better the ratios between staff and patients for improved patient care and less staff frustration. Willowbrook has set a goal of 400 to reduce the patient census to 4,000, according to Dr. Jack Hammond, director.

As of March 31, there were 5,516 residents. When Dr. Hammond came to Willowbrook in 1964, there were 8,287 residents. Current annual admissions run between 200 and 300, with two separate lists of more patients waiting to enter. Over 200 to 300 children 5 and under will have an average wait of 14 months before entrance. Some of the 1,350 over 5 will have to wait four or five years.

Selections are made on the basis of patient need and not on the needs of scientific research. "There are no research projects which have to do with admitting patients," Dr. Hammond explained. The one exception may be

the 15 patients taken four times a year into the small hepatitis research project under way, but these are accepted only after parents approve. "No child enters the unit unless the parents give their permission," he stipulated. Because almost all classes at Willowbrook offer some special training, most patients categorically fall under research, Dr. Hammond explained, but none are admitted for that sole purpose.

BALANCE

It is expected that the new admissions every year will offset the number of patient deaths and of the other patients who leave every year and become a part of the community. Of the 94 patients treated over eight years in the recently closed Neuro-Endocrine Research Unit within the school, 42 returned to society to become self-supporting and one went on to college.

Present admissions are roughly one-fourth of previous years. The decline started in 1964 with 836 admissions, 35 less than the year before. For the world's largest institution for the mentally retarded to start restricting admissions, look some day. On

Oct. 14, 1964, admissions were Any benefit derived from the opening of four 750-bed institutions scheduled for the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan will now have to wait indefinitely due to lack of state funds. However, the request to ease the overcrowding of the 384-acre Island institution with facilities for over 4,000 residents continues.

At present in the 25 patient buildings, the ambulatory and severely and profoundly retarded adults are considered 54.3 per cent overcrowded and the adults 25 per cent overcrowded, according to state standards, which are more lenient than those of the American Association of the Mentally Deficient.

OVERCROWDED

This organization, to cite only one example, views the physically handicapped adult males in Willowbrook living in conditions 115 per cent overcrowded. The 183 patients should be reduced to 132, it declares. For the New York metropolitan area, Willowbrook, 4 years old and continuing along with the other two schools, Letchworth Village and Wassaic, serve the most severe of the 3 per cent of this country's mentally retarded who require institutional care. The chance their child will

the selves or be cared for in the community.

As the public learns more about the problem of mental retardation, it has provided both public and private community resources to train and teach the other 97 per cent of the mentally retarded, not requiring institutional care.

"Over the last 10 years, we have been getting less and less inappropriate referrals," stated Dr. Hammond. Counseling the parents is needed in such cases. "The mongoloid child is easy to care for, trainable and sometimes educable. "In general, the child is friendly and open," explained Dr. Hammond.

"As she grows up, she will do much better if she is accepted by the family and living in a home situation. The school cannot by law accept an infant under 1 year. During this time as the child develops, the parents are taught how their child may attend schools starting when 4 years old and continuing to vocational school. Some may be able to gain employment. The earlier parents start training and educating their mentally retarded child, the better the chance their child will throughout life he lead.