

Despite law, Willowbrook can't be closed

State school can't meet state standards

By JANE KURTIN

If state Department of Health standards were enforced, Willowbrook State School might well be forced to close, according to information provided by a state health official.

Although Willowbrook has consistently fallen short of state health requirements, the department continues to issue certificates of operation because of the need for such an institution.

As explained by Dr. Richard Nauen, assistant commissioner of the department in the New York City Affairs Branch, the reason for this inconsistency is based on the need for the existence of the institution.

"Where there is less need," Dr. Nauen said, "we can be stronger in getting compliance with regulations."

The state Department of Health sets standards for voluntary and governmental institutions in New York City, but in the case of Willowbrook cannot demand compliance with them.

"The only thing we can do," Dr. Nauen said, "is refuse to issue a certificate of operation. We wouldn't do that with Willowbrook because where would the people go if they

couldn't be there?"

On a yearly basis, a team of about eight specialists are dispatched from the department to Willowbrook for a survey to determine compliance with state health standards.

"We send copies of our findings to the director of the institution, in this case Dr. Jack Hammond, and to the chairman of the Board of Visitors.

"We can recommend that

certain steps be taken to improve conditions, but then it is up to the institution to make the request for funds from the state Department of Mental Hygiene.

"But there is a limit to what can be done," Dr. Nauen continued, "when the money isn't available.

"It is not our responsibility to provide money. We can only advise the institution as to whether or not it meets our standards.

"Society," he concluded, "has lots of needs which should be met. The question is whether things are better or worse in terms of patient care. Our impression is that they aren't worse, and they're probably better."

An investigation which might have bearing on the funds made available for Willowbrook was

scheduled to begin this week.

Initiated by Assemblyman Edward J. Amman after he read articles in the Advance describing conditions at Willowbrook, the investigation was ordered by Dr. Frederic Grunberg, deputy commissioner of the state Department of Mental Hygiene.

Dr. Grunberg, who described the investigation as one which "would determine areas of

critical need at Willowbrook," was not available yesterday to give an exact date for the arrival of inspectors to the institution.

No one available in Dr. Grunberg's Albany office had knowledge of the investigation.

Dr. Hammond, at a meeting in Chicago, was not available to give a starting date for the investigation. No one in his office could give the information.

It's your opinion

Social workers

join in a plea

We wish to express our gratitude to the Advance for its current series of articles on Willowbrook State School. These articles have brought to the attention of the community the intolerable conditions which have existed here for so long; conditions which have grown even more horrible since the state budget cuts.

The Willowbrook residents cannot speak for themselves; they are unable to voice their own grievances. They cannot vote; they do not riot, protest or demonstrate. Thus their needs are easily ignored and their problems hidden. With an easy conscience legislators are able to slash state school appropriations.

It is therefore necessary for all humane members of the community to petition their representatives on the behalf of those who cannot do so themselves. The strength and justice of a community can only be judged by its efforts to protect and defend the rights of its weakest members.

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