

Editorials

'Don't do as I do...'

Among the facts revealed since the Advance started a series of articles on conditions under which the mentally defective children and adults live at Willowbrook State School was the startling admission by an official of the state Health Department that Willowbrook doesn't meet its standards. In fact, he said, if the standards were enforced, Willowbrook might have to close.

It's a very interesting coincidence that a state Health Department ruling has been cited by the trustees of Sailors Snug Harbor as the prime reason they are planning to move that venerable institution to a lonely area of the North Carolina coast. The present buildings, the trustees say, are considered unsafe by state regulations for the care of retired mariners.

The state Health Department sets standards for institutions, but if the institution is run by another state agency it cannot demand compliance. In other words, the state Department of Mental Hygiene can ignore the Health Department's regulations.

But the fault still lies primarily with the administration and the Legislature in Albany. The Department of Mental Hygiene can't do the job it's expected to do if it's denied the necessary funds.

The Department of Health can't give orders to the governor or the Legislature, either. They get their orders from the voters. Island voters will be very interested in seeing what they accomplish between now and the time they are up for election again.