

Staten Island Advance

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Willowbrook probe: When?

By JANE KURTIN

Mildew is beginning to form on a promise made by Assemblyman Edward J. Amann and the state Department of Mental Hygiene that Willowbrook State School would immediately be investigated to establish areas of critical need there.

Although there have been some steps made toward the materialization of the immediate investigation (launched, theoretically, more than 10 days ago), those agencies and officials directly involved with it are vague about what has been accomplished to date.

Amann, who initiated the investigation with a telephone call to Dr. Frederic Grunberg, deputy commissioner of the Department of Mental Hygiene, has not yet followed up on its progress.

Last week Amann paid a surprise evening visit to two of the staffers at Willowbrook

and, although he was spared the sight of the patients' daytime activities, described the scene as "depressing."

Commenting that "they (the Department of Mental Hygiene) have to be given a chance to get the investigation rolling," Amann assured that he "will absolutely, definitely follow up" on Willowbrook when the results of the re-evaluation of the institution are made known to him.

While he declined to explain what has been decided, Dr.

Grunberg reported that several checks into conditions already have taken place.

"We have reviewed areas of critical need with the director of Willowbrook and with members of the staff and are trying to get an exception to the freeze in certain areas of that operation," Dr. Grunberg said, referring to Gov. Rockefeller's freeze on state jobs.

"Even with the possible exception," Dr. Grunberg continued, "the situation there will remain tenuous. But we agree that there are some areas which require additional aid."

Precisely when patients and employes at Willowbrook State School might expect the financial fruits of the re-evaluation is still unresolved.

"We're living in a world of uncertainty," Dr. Grunberg said.

When asked which areas were under consideration for funds and additional attendants, Dr. Grunberg refused to answer, although he claimed to have such information.

"This information is of a highly technical nature," he said, "and would not be of any interest to the Advance. It might, perhaps, be of some interest to a social worker."

Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook, indicated that the kind of investigation ordered by Albany would not require his direct participation.

Contrary to Dr. Grunberg's statement that program analysts have met with Dr. Hammond to discuss particularly pressing problems, the

director indicated that there has not been a change in the routine, weekly evaluations which take place at the institution.

"We are in constant communication with the state Department of Mental Hygiene," Dr. Hammond said, "and have made them completely aware of our most critical areas of need."

"There are program analysts here very often," Dr. Hammond continued, "and their research does not require my presence."