

Dr. Hammond on admissions:

When do you jump the line?

By JANE KURTIN

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of running an institution like Willowbrook State School is making decisions about who gets in and who stays out.

Although he was the first director of a New York State institution to introduce a waiting list, Dr. Jack Hammond is frequently faced with "emergency situations," in which the emotional and financial welfare of an entire family is at stake.

In these cases, Dr. Hammond must examine the circumstances and resolve whether a special case justifies jumping the line for immediate admission.

The overwhelming problems which arise for families who must care for often profoundly retarded children has resulted in broken homes, parental suicides and a myriad of other familial ills.

Two cases described by Dr. Hammond give some idea of the kind of admissions he feels he "has to" make despite critical situations at the institution and an already too long waiting list.

"One father brought his son — a teen-ager — with him for an interview," he explained.

"For the whole time that I spoke with the father in a conference room, the son was run-

ning back and forth from wall to wall and banging himself against them. Also, he climbed up on radiators and would jump off them.

"The boy was not toilet trained, and for all these years the parents had taken care of him. Now it was just too much. The father had lost jobs and had himself been hospitalized because of a nervous breakdown. During the interview, the father cried and expressed tre-

mendous guilt because of having to institutionalize the boy.

"What can I do but admit the son as an emergency case?" Dr. Hammond asked.

While the first case clearly required immediate attention, Dr. Hammond introduced a visitor to a couple planning to admit a patient who has lived at home for more than 40 years.

Until recently, the 43-year-old woman who soon faces institutional life had been cared for by her mother. Currently, the 70-year-old mother is in a nursing home recuperating from a serious operation.

The move to commit Dorothy to Willowbrook was made by her sister and brother-in-law, who have cared for her during the mother's illness.

Dorothy is toilet-trained, is in good health, sleeps through the night and feeds herself. Nevertheless, her needs have proven too great for her sister. She qualifies as an emergency admission.

For the purpose of this article, Dorothy's sister will be called Ruth.

"When I first had to take Dorothy home," Ruth said, "my 12-year-old daughter was quite upset. Now, of course, she's gotten used to Dorothy, and I must say that she couldn't be kinder toward her.

"Things haven't gone well for us, since Dorothy came because of all the attention she needs. My husband and I have been

quarrelling and, after all, we've been married for more than 30 years.

"There is really nothing else for us to do. A social worker told me how I could get help caring for Dorothy for several hours a day, but what can be done in that time?

"My mother thinks that when she gets better, she'll be able to take Dorothy home again. But I don't know. I don't think so."