

# 2 not fired, but barred from Willowbrook

By JANE KURTIN

Dr. Frederic Grunberg, deputy commissioner of the state Department of Mental Hygiene, yesterday refused to discuss the possibility of reinstating Dr. Michael Wilkins and Mrs. Elizabeth Lee to their positions at Willowbrook State School.

Dr. Grunberg, who met with Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee after a morning press conference held by Manhattan Assemblyman Andrew Stein, reiterated that the two employees who were dismissed last Wednesday could work "somewhere else within the Department of Mental Hygiene."

Stein, who called for the children's bureau of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to conduct immediate investigation at Willowbrook,

joined Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee during their meeting with Dr. Grunberg.

Detained at a noon press conference, Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee telephoned the Manhattan office of the Department of Mental Hygiene to explain to Dr. Grunberg that they would be late.

The message never reached the deputy commissioner and 45 minutes after the appointment was scheduled, he stormed out

of his office, reportedly headed for another meeting.

"This lateness," Dr. Grunberg said as he exited, "gives me a good indication of what kind of people these are." Three minutes after he left, Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee arrived.

Stein reached Dr. Alan D. Miller, commissioner of the department, who said that "just by luck" he was meeting with Dr. Grunberg and would relay the message that Stein, Dr.

Wilkins and Mrs. Lee were waiting

Dr. Grunberg arrived 10 minutes later and was immediately asked whether the two employees had or had not been fired. (Recently, the Department of Mental Hygiene denied that the two were fired, despite the issuance of unconditional termination notices.)

Dr. Grunberg replied that Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee had not been fired, but that they could not work at Willowbrook.

Stein questioned the rationale of officials in the department, citing the excellent evaluations of Willowbrook's two former employees.

"Surely," the assemblyman said, "when there is such a problem finding qualified, dedicated people to work at Willowbrook, a personality conflict with the director of the institution cannot be reasonable grounds for dismissal."

Acknowledging that Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee did have very good qualifications, Dr. Grunberg went on to explain that personality differences certainly were sufficient grounds to fire a provisional employee.

"Any employer," Dr. Grunberg said, "must take his relationship with members of the staff into account when hiring because a rapport is needed for the successful operation of the administration."

Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee persisted in asking for a satisfactory justification for their dismissal.

Dr. Grunberg steadfastly denied that the two had been fired, although he did imply that their working at Willowbrook was non-negotiable.

When Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee refused to accept anything

Willowbrook staff, Dr. Grunberg claimed that they "do not want to work with the Department of Mental Hygiene."

"I want to know why I am being punished," Mrs. Lee asked.

"Your terminated employment at Willowbrook," Dr. Grunberg responded, "is not a punitive measure. As you see, I came here prepared to discuss other positions in the department with you, but apparently you do not want to work with Mental Hygiene."

**"BUT WHY . . ."**

But why," Mrs. Lee continued, "can I not have my job at Willowbrook State School?"

"There are other areas where a need exists for qualified personnel," Dr. Grunberg answered.

Dr. Grunberg, who stated that parent involvement was a must, was unmoved by a report from Mr. and Mrs. Charles Haney (members of Building 6 parents' group) that the families were entirely in favor of Dr. Wilkins' return to their building.

At the end of the meeting, the only points clarified were that Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee could not work at Willowbrook but were not fired; that parent involvement is necessary but will not help in the reinstatement of the two employees; that Dr. Grunberg will not overrule Dr. Jack Hammond's decision and that the Willowbrook director will not rehire Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee unless he is required to do so by higher-ups in the Department of Mental Hygiene.