

Employee unit says patients 'first concern'

Eager Smith, president of the International Union for Advancement, a group representing about 100 workers at Willowbrook, State School, issued a statement yesterday saying that the "first concern" of his group is that the patients receive proper care.

He said a report prepared by the American Association for Mental Retardation shows that "at least 4,000 attendants would be required to provide proper service" for the more than 5,000 patients at the state school.

Smith, noting the hardship faced by employees, said that the staff presently consists of 1,805 attendants. This compares with 3,349 employees on Nov. 30, 1970, just prior to budget cuts and a job freeze ordered in Albany, and with 2,844 employees last November.

Calling the situation at Willowbrook "impossible," Smith charged that the budget cuts were made "without much resistance from the Civil Service Employees Association, which is the recognized union."

But Smith added that "the real issue should not be overlooked — the quality of patient care has seriously deteriorated to a point where the safety of the patient and employes is in question."

The group said that it felt Dr. Michael Wilkins, recently "fired" from his position at Willowbrook and then reinstated but transferred, should not have been transferred without a hearing.

Smith claimed, however, that Dr. Wilkins' conduct was questionable and that a few grievances had been lodged against him by other workers.

The union spokesman said he did not want only to criticize conditions at Willowbrook and pointed out that "some attendants have implemented programs on their own initiative to coordinate and develop the patients."