

Willowbrook \$\$ gloomy

By JANE KURTIN

Despite Gov. Rockefeller's release of \$5 million for the state Department of Mental Hygiene and the promise of \$20 million more in April, the outlook for next year in the state's institutions is as gloomy if not gloomier than it was this year.

Although legislators have consistently taken the position that "no money is available," Rockefeller, in the heat of public outcry over conditions at Willowbrook State School, came up with a formidable sum.

But this money, which must be divided among 37 institutions for the care of 75,000 patients, may be nothing more than an appropriation that never turns into spendable dollars.

The requested budget for the Department of Mental Hygiene this year was about \$630 million. The Legislature "trimmed the fat" to \$600 million, and the director of the budget froze everything above \$580 million.

Rockefeller's sudden discovery of \$5 million for the institutions is apparently money above the spendable budget of \$580 million and is actually less than one-third of what the Department of Mental Hygiene lost out on because of the freeze.

It is not unfair to assume — bearing in mind what happened to the department's budget for this year — that the \$20 million promised in April will be frozen again, leaving the institutions with a budget which is, in effect, 6 per cent less valuable than the rock-bottom funds they had to work with for the 1971-72 fiscal year.

The money depreciates by 6 per cent because of inflation — a factor which does not seem to be taken into account by the legislators. An example of this is Willowbrook State School's fuel expenditure.

So far, Willowbrook has spent \$592,673 just to keep the place heated. The projected deficit for fuel only is \$560,235. The deficit for overall maintenance (which does not include patient care) is in the area of \$981,435.

In part, the situation was eased because the state released \$687,000. But, there are still \$300,000 worth of bills that are going to have to be paid for somehow.

Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook, anticipates that "the deficit is going to come out of our hides."

To make up what will have to be paid to pay Con Edison and the other utility companies, some area of the institution's

operation is going to have to be trimmed.

The writing is on the wall. Willowbrook will have to resort to cutting back in personal care for patients to scrape up the \$300,000.

Willowbrook, the largest of the state's institutions, is getting the biggest chunk of the \$5 million and will be able to start filling 300 vacant positions — most of them related directly to patient care.

Willowbrook, however, is short more than 1,000 in personnel, not 600 as spokesmen for the Department of Mental Hygiene insist. The institution was nearly 300 persons short before the job freeze went into effect last November.

Many people who have worked diligently to dramatize the conditions at Willowbrook are more upset than pleased with Rockefeller's promise of money.

Murray Schneps, who has a 3 1/2-year-old daughter at Willowbrook, sees Rockefeller's announcement as "a move to stop the mounting protest by all the citizens of New York against a brutal disregard for the lives of the mentally retarded."

Certainly, the promise of additional funds has given false hope to the parents of children in Willowbrook State School and has in part dampened the public rage that began when the Advance released descriptive articles about the institution seven weeks ago.

Is \$20 million ever going to find its way to the institutions of New York? Judging from past experiences, no one with a relative or friend at Willowbrook is betting on it.