

Willowbrook's need: 'Budget twice as big'

By JANE KURTIN

In order for Willowbrook State School to operate effectively it would have to receive about twice as much money per patient as it does now, Dr. Jack Hammond testified yesterday on the first day of week-long meetings sponsored by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

Dr. Hammond, the director of the Island institution and the only witness at the opening session, admitted that the state is not providing all that is needed for adequate patient care.

Spectators and newsmen filled the Borough Hall hearing room as Dr. Hammond described conditions at the institution and their steady decline since the state job freeze went into effect in December 1970.

The hearing panel, headed by Councilman Frank Biondolillo, consisted of the Rev. John Servodidio of Catholic Charities, Anthony Gaeta, administrative assistant to Congressman John M. Murphy, Manhattan Councilman Robert I. Postel and Kermit Casscells, deputy borough president.

In addition to opening the meeting by asking Dr. Hammond to give a statistical picture of Willowbrook, members of the panel and representatives of the SPCC concentrated on trying to pinpoint who was to blame for the

conditions now existing at Willowbrook.

Dr. Hammond sought to avoid blame by the Department of Mental Hygiene and said that if anyone was guilty it was "the taxpayers of New York."

Ira Raab, attorney for the SPCC, and William Katz, director of SPCC questioned Dr. Hammond about the budget for Willowbrook compared with the budgets for other, smaller Department of Mental Hygiene facilities.

"As I understand it," Raab said, "Willowbrook has about 10 per cent of the patient population of the department and only 5 per cent of the budget."

Dr. Hammond, who said he did not have the exact figures with him, agreed that the estimate seemed accurate.

Asked what kind of a budget Willowbrook would need to bring it up to an acceptable standard, Dr. Hammond suggested that the answer might not lay in additional funds so much as it does in a restructuring of the institution with a big reduction in the number of residents.

"In order to be effective," Dr. Hammond said, "we must first be able to reduce the density of the patient population."

"In private institutions, the

estimated yearly cost of patient care is between \$11,000 and \$12,000. We get \$7,704. I guess "that to be effective, we would need about twice the money for each patient."

Postel pointed out to Dr. Hammond that "it is a Class A misdemeanor for children to be living in conditions which endanger their health and safety."

"Would you," Postel asked Dr. Hammond, "say that the Department of Mental Hygiene was committing a misdemeanor by not providing adequate care for patients?"

"All I can say," Dr. Hammond replied, "is that New York State is not providing what is needed, and all I can do is ask for improvements."

Dr. Hammond was visibly angered by questions which bordered on suggesting that Willowbrook State School did not follow a prescribed procedure for having autopsies performed on patients who die at the institution of undetermined causes.

"In every case where a patient has died who has not been under treatment for an active medical condition," Dr. Hammond said, "the case is referred to the medical examiner, who sometimes permits one of our physicians

to perform the autopsy while he supervises."

Dr. Hammond said that for the 1971 fiscal year, Willowbrook recorded 129 deaths 11 of which were the result of choking.

"I might add," Dr. Hammond said, "that we know about choking deaths because we look for them. We also know of the various diseases which afflict the patients here because we are constantly looking for them."

The director admitted that the attendant physician staff was inadequate and that general medical examinations of patients are done only once a year.

"But because so many of the patients are under continuous care," Dr. Hammond explained, "they are constantly being examined by staff doctors."

Yesterday's hearing closed when Dr. Hammond said he had no objection to a plan put forth by Councilman Biondolillo to have inmates of city and state correctional facilities trained for service at Willowbrook in lieu of serving out full sentences.

"Certainly," Dr. Hammond said, "I would have no objection to having people who have been carefully screened coming to work at Willowbrook."