

# Probe reveals gap in record of dead girl

By JUDITH HOLMES

**Blank pages in the medical records of Sharon Smalls, 6, a Willowbrook State School resident who died Dec. 1, 1970, were disclosed yesterday at the fifth and final day of hearings in Borough Hall.**

Testifying before the four-member panel set up by the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook, revealed that the last entry in the ward records of Sharon Smalls was made three weeks before her death.

Dr. Hammond, who was reading the ward records for the first time, decried what he called "a serious deficiency" in the records. "This deficiency in the records is the fault of the very same individuals who came here to complain," Dr. Hammond said, referring to ward attendants who testified Wednesday on the question of Sharon's death.

But poor records will continue to be the rule as long as the school remains understaffed, Dr. Hammond warned. "Often the nurses and the attendants have to make a choice between taking care of the residents and doing paper work," he said.

"If we insist they (nurses and attendants) take notes," said Dr. Milton Jacobs, administrative assistant to Dr. Hammond, "the patients won't be cared for."

Dr. Jacobs himself was not aware of Sharon's death until five weeks later, he testified, when a group of attendants approached him with com-

plaints against a registered nurse for patient neglect.

Councilman Frank Blondillo then asked Dr. Jacobs how a death in Building 14 (where Sharon was staying) which is under Dr. Jacob's jurisdiction, could escape his attention.

"This was a medical death," said Dr. Jacobs. "The patient died of bronchial pneumonia. This was nothing I would rush over for."

"A medical examiner was never notified," Dr. Hammond added. "There was nothing suspicious about the death."

Medical records read by Dr. Fernando Perez, clinical physician, revealed that Sharon had been ill off and on with bronchial pneumonia since October 1969. On several occasions, antibiotic treatment was applied with recorded success.

Yet, on the night prior to Sharon's death, Dr. A. Vassiliades, attending physician diagnosed her condition as bronchial pneumonia and ordered oxygen, not antibiotics, for the patient. The patient, it was testified several times, was blue in color.

Oxygen therapy, explained Dr. Hammond, means moving the patient to a special oxygen treatment room.

Due to the gap in the ward's records there is no proof that Sharon did receive such treatment. In fact, testimony by attendants Wednesday revealed that Sharon was still in her regular room the morning of her death.

## NO RECORD ON NURSE

Asked what nurse at night would be responsible for oxygen delivery, Dr. Hammond said: "We don't know what nurse because no records were kept."

Ira Raab, counsel to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, asked Dr. Perez if the death could have been averted if oxygen had been administered. Dr. Perez replied, "It is possible."

Visibly upset by these and other disclosures, Dr. Hammond spoke of the staffing problems at Willowbrook. "Not only has the freeze affected us, but people just don't want to work in the stink and the stench of an institution like this, where all they hear is public criticism of their efforts," he declared.

Willowbrook, he testified, is plagued by absentee rates, especially on weekends, and the fact that on some weekends only two doctors are present for the entire school.

The hearing closed with an announcement by William Katz, director of SPCC, that the society has filed three petitions in Family Court against the state Department of Mental Hygiene, "which we feel is responsible for these conditions."

District Attorney John M. Braisted Jr., who has requested copies of all the proceedings at this week's hearings, will begin an investigation next week, according to Raab.