

Willowbrook conditions worse

Director cites perils for patients

By LAWRENCE DeMARIA and FRANK HAGELBERG

Willowbrook State School struggled through the first day of a statewide strike by civil service employes yesterday amid fears a prolonged work stoppage would endanger the lives of the 5,000 patients at the Island facility.

By midday, with 80 per cent of the work force out, and several hundred volunteers on duty in the kitchens and wards, Dr. Jack Hammond painted a dim picture of the remainder of the Easter weekend.

"If the strike continues for another 24 to 48 hours," the school's director said, "there is a great possibility patients will be dying of neglect or starvation because of the lack of care."

Hammond and other officials of the State Department of Mental Hygiene repeated their appeal for volunteers to help in the care and feeding of patients at the school.

"I ask any parent who is capable of taking a child home, come take the child," Hammond said.

Early yesterday afternoon, Dr. Milton Jacobs, assistant director at Willowbrook, toured a complex of five buildings with reporters. The buildings house 450 children, most of them infants and toddlers. At the time, only 19 of the children had been taken home by their parents. Dr. Jacobs termed the number "meager."

Dr. Jacobs said he was encouraged by the number of vol-

unteers that had arrived at the school during the day, but commented that "we can never have enough volunteers."

"These kids need slow feeding and plenty of fluids," Jacobs said, noting that dehydration was one of the major threats facing the patients.

Dr. Hammond also expressed concern over the danger of dehydration, and expressed alarm over the fact that most of the volunteers are not trained to deal with the patients.

"A patient could gag or could develop a fever," Dr. Hammond said, "and it could go unnoticed. We can't expect volunteers to recognize these conditions although our regular employes could."

Approximately 150 employes on the night shift which ended at 7 a.m. yesterday remained on duty throughout most of the day, joined by 195 out of 466 day shift workers. School officials said that more than 400 volunteers had arrived at the school by mid-afternoon.

According to officials in Albany, Willowbrook was one of two state institutions particularly hard hit by the walkout.

A spokesman for Mental Hygiene Commissioner Dr. Allan D. Miler said the crisis at Willowbrook was caused by the fact that "the entire food service staff did not show up." The spokesman emphasized, however, that "basic physical and medical needs are being met" at all state facilities, including Willowbrook.

Breakfast yesterday morning for the patients at Willowbrook consisted of milk and cookies. Luncheon foods included spaghetti, milk, cold cuts, cheese, hardboiled eggs, and graham crackers. A nurse at the school was quick to admit that the meals "weren't as balanced as they usually get."

Plans for last night's dinner called for hot meat, mashed potatoes, and canned fruit, the spokesman said. Previous plans to serve TV dinners stored at the school for emergency purposes were cancelled, and the spokesman said there was a good chance the staff and volunteers would be able to produce "at least two hot meals" today.

A nutritionist with the Mental Hygiene Department was flown to Willowbrook shortly after noon by helicopter from Albany. Three other nutritionists were also scheduled to arrive from upstate during the day. "Their role will be to keep a close watch on the situation, manage the kitchens, and even cook if necessary," a state spokesman said.

A mental hygiene spokesman in Albany said this afternoon the "item of primary consideration" at Willowbrook was food. "The kitchens are in operation, and food is being prepared," he said.

"But," he added, "cooking is one thing, and serving the food is another."

Picketing employes of the Civil Service Employees Association remained outside Willowbrook throughout the day, attempting to persuade workers to stay away from the school. The sign on the brick wall at the entrance to the school was festooned with placards and a dead rat with a sign reading "scab" underneath.

Police reported no further disturbance after four persons were arrested early yesterday as the day shift reported to work. Tyrone Daniels, 31, of Manhattan, Allen Iverson, 42, of 86 Coale Ave., Castleton Corners, and Thomas Delaney, 44, who gave an address at the school, were charged with dis-