

Willowbrook director is transferred

By JANE KURTIN

Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook State School, will leave the Staten Island facility for the mentally retarded to accept a post as director of the Rome State School, beginning July 6.

The announcement of the director's transfer was made yesterday by Dr. Alan D. Miller, commissioner of the state Department of Mental Hygiene.

Dr. Miller said that the new appointment "fulfills a personal desire of Dr. Hammond's to return to the Rome State School, where he served as assistant director for five years before his assignment to Willowbrook."

Dr. Hammond came to Willowbrook in 1964. A year before Robert Kennedy called it a "snakepit," starting a statewide scandal.

Although he labored to improve conditions at the world's largest facility for the mentally retarded, Dr. Hammond was faced with job of cleaning up the mess created by years of neglect.

Among his first moves to reduce the severely overcrowded conditions at Willowbrook was the creation of a

waiting list. Until 1964, the institution accepted virtually anyone who was taken there.

"Dr. Hammond," Dr. Miller said, "has been instrumental in starting innovative rehabilitation and special education programs at Willowbrook during his administration. Among them are the hospital improvement program to stimulate severely and profoundly mentally retarded persons to achieve basic self-



Dr. Jack Hammond

care skills and the infant therapy complex, which he conceived and designed to provide early training to mentally retarded youngsters."

In the years between the Kennedy visit and last November, Willowbrook and Dr. Hammond remained inconspicuous.

An expose of conditions at Willowbrook began in the Advance Nov. 15 and in the subsequent months the director became a key figure in the dispute over why patients were not receiving adequate care.

Frequently blamed for what many parents felt was a failure to call the public's attention to conditions at Willowbrook, Dr. Hammond was also loudly supported by a sizable faction of employes there.

Perhaps his most violently opposed action was the firing of Dr. Michael Wilkins and Mrs.

Elizabeth (Dee) a social worker, after the two were active in publicizing conditions in the institution.

After the firing of the two young professionals and after attempts at reconciliation between them and the director failed, parent groups energetically demanded his resignation.

But, soon after, when a rumor spread through Willowbrook that the director would be leaving because of the fight over Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee, several hundred employes walked off their jobs and used state buses to travel to Albany for a confrontation with Dr. Miller. They insisted that Dr. Hammond remain as director.

Although many gains were made for the patients at Willowbrook — among them the restoration of all positions lost during the state-imposed job freeze — strong feelings for and against Dr. Hammond lingered.

The director, who worked many 12-hour days and has not had a vacation in about six years, was pictured as hero and villain, and his presence at Willowbrook aroused strong feelings on both sides.

Dr. Hammond's post will put him in charge of the 3,500-patient facility for the mentally retarded, which accepts patients from six upstate counties.

"Rome State School," Dr. Hammond said, "is a large institution with many of the problems common to other large institutions. I hope I will be able to achieve the goals I have outlined for myself, which are the same goals I had for Willowbrook."

As his first task, Dr. Hammond will work toward the implementation of the accreditation standards established by the accreditation council for Residential Facilities for the Mentally Retarded.

Among other projects, Dr. Hammond will be particularly concerned with the integration of institutional programs with community programs for the retarded.

Dr. Mioerag Ristic, who was appointed deputy director at Willowbrook two months ago, will take over as acting director at the institution until a successor to Dr. Hammond is appointed.