

Willowbrook director starts to dismantle it



Dr. Miodrag Ristic, acting director of Willowbrook State School is at work to dismantle the mammoth institution in favor of more intimate and localized services.

By GERALD S. NAGEL

Dr. Miodrag Ristic is four weeks into his tenure as acting director of the Willowbrook State School, but he has already begun to implement the state's decision to dismantle it.

Dr. Ristic, who is a charming and gracious 34-year-old psychiatrist from Yugoslavia, said he was appointed to the position not only because of his three years as deputy for clinical services, but

also because he agrees with the State Department of Mental Hygiene that large institutions for the mentally retarded should be decentralized with an eye towards returning the patient to family life.

During an hour-long interview in his office, at which the slim administrator wore a blue polo shirt and wash and wear trousers and his curly black hair dipped down to his forehead, Dr. Ristic discussed why this concept is now widely favored by mental health experts.

"The sheer size of an institution such as this is impersonal and dehumanizing," Dr. Ristic said, "and anyone who can choose between a high-rise apartment and a small home of his own, can glimpse that.

"Public places are nice to visit, but no one, including the retarded, want to live there," he added.

"We can return many patients to their families if they receive the proper training and there are better situations than