

Willowbrook Horror Story

By JOSE FRIEDMAN

Dr. William Bronston is in charge of medical care in a building at Willowbrook, the state school for the mentally retarded.

On two weekends recently — in September and last month — he carried a camera and took notes on his rounds.

He described the results in Brooklyn federal court yesterday during testimony in a suit seeking improved conditions at Willowbrook.

"This is a picture of Patricia. She had allegedly fallen off the edge of a table and incurred this deep gash," he said.

"This is another patient. Note the punctures and v-shaped cuts. My experience shows that these are caused by [large] keys."

Another picture of two feet.

"Foot infection is enormously common at Willowbrook," Bronston said. "The two causes are lack of adequate care and filthy conditions. Look at the detergent eating away at his feet."

A picture of arms covered with running sores.

"This ulcer is repeatedly kept open because she has nothing else to do on the ward but pick it."

Bronston, one of the first professionals to openly describe his experiences at Willowbrook to reporters, blamed the problems on an inadequate, overworked staff.

"The only thing the staff has time to react to are crises. So the residents act

up and because there isn't enough staff, I've got to keep 50 per cent of my residents in a stupor on major tranquilizers," he testified.

Whether there is enough staff at Willowbrook is the key to the trial which began yesterday.

A group of parents and two organizations representing the retarded have asked U. S. District Court Judge Orin Judd to order the state to improve conditions at the Staten Island institution.

The state, which has won two postponements of the trial since March, contends it is doing its best and needs only time to complete the job.

But yesterday, Bronston, a supervising nurse and 10 parents said conditions at the school had been deteriorating.

Supervising Nurse Inez Stevens, who runs three buildings at night, remembered Nov. 14 in her testimony.

"It was very busy," she said. "At one time, I had two lacerations, a seizure and a disturbed patient. I'm the only nurse on duty. I didn't know where to go. It's just too much for one person."

Conditions at Willowbrook are so chaotic, Miss Stevens said, that she was placed in charge of the buildings last September without formally being instructed on her responsibilities.

"Someone was supposed to show me around for a week but this didn't happen. No

one ever really told me what to do," she said.

Bronston said that overworked plumbers did not have time to fix stopped-up toilets and overworked attendants did not have time to flush those that do work. **'Out of Toilet Bowls'**

"And since there are no water fountains, most of the residents drink directly out of toilet bowls filled with excrement," he said.

A Brooklyn parent recalled when her daughter was allegedly beaten on Oct. 24.

"I called that day and they said she was fine but then one of the lawyers told me she had been beaten," she said.

"So I called back and they still said she was fine until I told them what the lawyer had said. Then they said 'That's right. She was beaten with keys but we can't tell you anymore.'"

Today, the defense was expected to call several experts, including Dr. James Clements, president-elect of the American Assn. on Mental Deficiency. He and the other experts have been making periodic tours of Willowbrook and will report their findings.

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