

Willowbrook bosses targets of parents, staff

By POLLY KUMMEL

Parents of the residents of Building 23 at Willowbrook State School and the employes who staff the unit have banded together against the school's administration in an effort to provide the minimum of basic care to the children housed there.

More than 30 persons met in the basement of the building yesterday for more than three hours to air their grievances and disgust with the team leader of the unit and the administration. Much of the criticism was directed and blame laid at the feet of Dr. Miodrag Ristic, director of the school.

Dr. Ristic had been requested to appear before a meeting of the building staff, the Parents Benevolent Society and a Civil Service Employes Association representative. The meeting was called primarily to effect the dismissal of the team leader, Dr. Cora Baldos, a psychologist who is supposed to coordinate the rehabilitation of the patients.

Dr. Baldos did not attend the meeting and was unavailable for comment.

It soon became apparent that the dismissal of the team leader was not the only major issue at hand. All charged the administration with ignoring pleas from the building staff for clothes, furniture and adequate staffing.

Ristic, however, did not appear at the meeting. He was said to have been in Albany yesterday. Representing him was Robert Sweet, the school's new director of personnel. Sweet admitted at the outset that he had no power to act on the spot and said all he could do would be report to Ristic and make his own recommendations as personnel director.

A petition signed by 51 staffers listed 10 grievances against the Dr. Baldos and "demanded" a general meeting. Among the petition's charges are that she does not listen to the problems and needs of the workers, plans independently on the team, does not check conditions in the building personally and does not know residents and their needs.

Briefly, the staffers charged Dr. Baldos with ignoring necessities of everyday life in the wards. They claim they have no clothes to dress the children, not enough help, no furniture and no dietary help. Dr. Baldos was told several times they say, of the laundry crisis — soiled clothing would wait days for pickup — and received no reply or were told that it wasn't her job.

"She doesn't have time to do anything but pass the buck," one of the workers charged. "She has no respect for anyone."

Workers say they arrived one day recently to find a plan posted for the care and rehabilitation of the patients. No other staff members were consulted on the formulation of the plan, one which was premised on the addition of many new employes to the staff.

Teachers, rehabilitation workers, nurses, attendants and aides claim Dr. Baldos knows nothing of the residents and their needs. They were supposed to have been compiling evaluations of the residents in meetings since Christmas.

Ward personnel say that, until recently, only one meeting was actually called by the team leader for an evaluation, and that in an extreme case. The patient involved was considered obese and violent. The staff agreed that behavior modification could serve to reduce her

weight problem and bring her behavioral problems under control. Dr. Baldos, they say, instructed that the reward used in the modification training be food.

THREE MEETINGS

In the last two weeks, three other meetings have been called by Dr. Baldos with the morning staff. None has been called for the other shifts. Four evaluations have now been completed on the patients in the building, three of which were largely put together by Dr. William Bronston.

Building 23 employes say they have been given orders by the team leader which conflict with other judgments for the well-being of a patient. They cite a diabetic patient who Dr. Bronston, the medical and psychiatric doctor for the building, had to restrict to the ward to control her diet.

The diabetic patient subsequently asked Dr. Baldos to arrange a job for her on the grounds. According to the staff, she found the job for the patient in one of the kitchens at the school.

Both black and white personnel charge the team leader with discriminatory practices. Two white teachers cited several instances when Dr. Baldos asked them to fill out forms because of the "ignorance and illiteracy" of the rest of the staff — meaning the black workers. Such forms, they charge, were to be completed by the team leader herself.

ONE DISMISSED

Many others recalled two recent cases of child abuse, one perpetrated by a black and the other by a white. The black was dismissed by Dr. Baldos. The white worker is still working on the ward.

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No person present could recall seeing the team leader meet with any parents about their child — and the parents are said to be quite active and often present around Building 23. They were able to recall one time the leader had met with the parents of a child who

had been severely injured in an accident in the ward.

Several parents present said they do not even know what the team leader looks like.

Dr. Baldos is further charged with ignoring the needs of the afternoon and evening shifts. The head night nurse, Mrs. Nancy Begeley, said the only contacts she had had with the team leader were on a few occasions when Dr. Baldos came to complain of the incompetence of the night staff and to suggest that there was a preponderance of little-utilized night staffers.

SHORT OF HELP

The evening nurse, who has charge of the entire building, cited instances when she herself had to set up the dining room in the morning because of too few employes.

Lynn Crawford, a rehabilitation therapist in the building, said, "She always refers to the residents as the 'autist' or the 'schizophrenic' or the 'retarded girl' — never as 'Mary,' 'Susan' or 'Jean.' She doesn't treat them as human beings."

Foremost in the minds of the staff and the parents was the lack of clothing for residents in the building. Laundry services at the school are antiquated and overloaded. Recognizing the problem, the administration is presently seeking bids to contract laundry services during the rehabilitation of the school's facilities. But, workers say, there will then be a lapse of five days between the time the laundry goes out and the time it is returned.

Parents say there is now a sign in front of the administration building turning away clothing donations.

Parents charge that the clothing donations are turned away because the school administrators "can't be bothered to sort and distribute the clothes."

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