

Willowbrook aide denies charges

By POLLY KUMMEL

Dr. Cora Baldos, psychologist and team leader in Building 23 at Willowbrook State School who was the subject of discussion at an employes' meeting Wednesday, said yesterday she was unaware the session had been called. Wednesday is Dr. Baldos' day off.

She said, however, that she was aware that some of the staff members weren't completely satisfied with her leadership. "Mr. Sweet (Robert Sweet, director of personnel) said they wanted to talk to me. I said, 'Why not?' I'd rather discuss things. I'm a very democratic person.

"I like everyone to communicate their feelings," Dr. Baldos continued. "As a team leader, I like cooperation and to have pleasant relationships at work. Therefore, I would like to meet with them very much.

"My door is always open to them. They know that, although it has to remain physically closed because otherwise there would be residents wandering in all the time for no reason. I have told them to come to me — even with a personal problem. So I waited for Mr. Sweet to call me about having a meeting. He didn't call, so I thought this was taken care of."

The team leader expressed shock and dismay at the allegations which her staff had made during the three-hour meeting.

Among the charges which the employes leveled was that she seldom met with the staff to discuss programs for the residents.

"Whatever decisions that require opinions and evaluations, I try to discuss with the staff one by one," Dr. Baldos said. "It is not true that

I called only one meeting till recently. It is true that I only called them a few times, but no one could ever come because we are understaffed — so why call them? The patients have to be taken care of.

AWARE OF NEED

"I am very, very aware of the different needs of the residents. I have an encompassing idea of everything they need. As soon as I assessed those needs after I got here (Nov. 21), I started working from bottom to top and all around.

"When I arrived, there was no furniture — not in the offices, not in the wards. I made acquisition orders for furniture and clothes, and they told me it would take three to six months to get them. We still haven't gotten anything from the business office.

"My main concern is this: If we think the residents are entitled to being treated as human beings, we must provide the basic things to make them act like human beings.

"The biggest need I had was to get more employes — all kinds — and equipment from the service. I tried very hard to leave no stone unturned.

"When I made requisitions, I talked to the departments concerned, wrote letters, made phone calls. I wrote to Dr. Ristic (Miodrag Ristic, director of Willowbrook) and gave him my staff requirements and I went to all the departments to get different, new staff members. Fourteen new people are due to arrive Monday.

"For four months, we had no ward clerk, no secretary, no steno — I have had to do most everything myself.

"The needs of Building 23 are so huge, so overwhelming that I have tried to get supplies, to get everything we need from all angles.

"I am very well aware of the clothes problem. Every time I made rounds on my own, I found people naked. This is either because they don't like to wear clothes or because they tear them to pieces till finally there are very few left.

"We give them to the laundry and we don't get them back. And we don't get replacements for the torn clothes. Part of the program we're trying to implement involves residents going to the school in our basement. But many times they can't go down there because they don't have any clothes.

"These are young adults we are talking about. They have very healthy appetites and no place to burn the energy. Many are hyperactive, anyway. So they break cabinets, chairs, beds.

"So you can see, I do know their needs. I have been trying to set up a program and start

it under the most adverse conditions. I couldn't get more people to supervise ward activities and motivation programs, so I assigned those people we have to start. Most of them aren't trained in this type of therapy.

"And much of the time they just can't do a program because they also have to take care of the ward problems. The overall design of a program has to be foregone until they have time to do it.

"But there must be some activity on the wards. People can't just sit there. So you use crayons, push and pulls for motivation. You have to get them to react to situations instead of just sitting and losing track of reality.

"My population is profoundly retarded. But they need to be self-fulfilled and self-satisfied — it begets a good image of

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oneself. And success begets success.

"Also, you have to teach them to develop their bodies physically, if not for useful work then for them to take care of themselves.

"In a reorganization such as Willowbrook is undergoing with unitization, it would seem to me that the team leader would have to have a skeleton outline of what he wants to do. I have explained that this is an assignment that will be applied when we get the new staff, but I have told the people now that we will make changes as we go along. At the moment it is the best we can have.

"I think the problem is that the staff and I have different perceptions of the same problem. I think it is my job to organize everything effectively, to get the core of a program and to listen to

suggestions anyone may have. They want to make decisions all along the way; but they are not the team leader, I am and I must make the decisions.

"I have degrees in education, administration and psychology. That's what I'm equipped to do — to formulate a program and see that it is administered. I have that background and that's why I was hired for this job.

"There should be two team leaders. It's too much for one person. Dr. Ristic is the unit chief, but he doesn't work there because he has to be busy with everything else. I don't have that extra person.

"The staff is too sensitive. There are high expectations of the attendants and the doctors for me to pacify or help the residents who are distributed among all four wards. It is impossible for me to be there all the time. Under the circumstances, I am trying to do the most with what we have.

"What happens is that I am trying to make changes or improvements in the organization and functions of the ward in terms of giving service. Many of my employes do not like any change, all they want to do is add more employes. When the new ones come Monday, we will be ready with a plan which can be workable as we see the new people and learn about their abilities."

Dr. Baldos also explained what had happened concerning a girl whose behavior the team had decided to change through behavior modification. The staffers alleged that the patient had problems of obesity and violence and that Dr. Baldos had said to use food as a reward.

Dr. Baldos explained she

meant that food was to be used only in a very controlled way: The girl would be placed on a strict diet and any reward would be non-caloric, such as celery, and within the proper daily intake of the patient. Dr. Baldos feels the staff misunderstood her reasons and method of using food as a reward.

She also explained an incident of a diabetic who had been restricted to the ward to control her diet and for whom Dr. Baldos found a job in the kitchen. Staffers had cited that action as an indication of the team leader's incompetence.

Dr. Baldos said she was unable to have the girl transferred but because the girl was motivated, finally found a job for her in the kitchen. However, because of the diabetic condition, it was arranged that the girl would

work in the baby building where she wouldn't be tempted by food.

Dr. Baldos said she was shocked to find that the employes had accused her of discriminating against black workers by choosing white people to perform certain jobs. She said that she had divided the work of doing case reviews among four persons because they were the ones who were able to get to the meeting and were familiar with most of the patients. The staff also claimed that Dr. Baldos had dismissed a black worker on the spot and maintained that two weeks after a second incident, a white worker was still on the job.

Dr. Baldos said that in both cases she had reported the incidents to Dr. Milton Jacobs and Dr. Ristic and that they were the ones who decided how the cases would be handled.

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