

Director of Willowbrook reported on his way out



Dr. Miodrag Ristich

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Dr. Miodrag Ristich, director of Willowbrook Developmental Center, is apparently under pressure from the state Department of Mental Hygiene to resign.

Dr. Ristich told the Advance yesterday that there was "no truth" to rumors that have abounded at Willowbrook that his resignation was imminent.

He would not, however, deny that he has been under pressure from state officials to submit his resignation.

When asked if Dr. Stuart L. Keill, New York City regional director for the Department of Mental Hygiene, had asked for his resignation, Dr. Ristich would only say: "I can't confirm that."

"I don't care to comment on that," he added.

"I haven't gotten a resignation," Dr. Keill said from his Manhattan office.

Dr. Keill, however, would also neither confirm nor deny reports that he had asked for Dr. Ristich's resignation. Any confirmation of that report, he said, would have to come from Dr. Ristich.

Reportedly there has been a rift in recent days between Keill and Ristich, a dispute over the best way to run the long-troubled, much-publicized Willowbrook facility.

"I would not call it in-fighting," Dr. Keill said in response to a question. "I have been critical of certain things at Willowbrook."

Dr. Keill said that it would not be appropriate "nor tactful" to discuss what the disagreements between him and Dr. Ristich have been because of testimony being heard in Brooklyn Federal Court.

Attempts yesterday to reach Dr. Alan D. Miller, state commissioner, were unsuccessful. H. A. F. Wolfe, director of communications, reported that Dr. Miller was out of Albany on business.

Wolfe, after speaking with Miller's secretary and a deputy commissioner, said that no resignation had been received by the commissioner.

"If he is going to resign," Wolfe said, "we have no knowledge of it. He (Ristich) is the only one who could tell you that."

Wolfe was asked if Dr. Miller had asked for Dr. Ristich's resignation. He said he had no knowledge of that, but he would not deny it.

To his knowledge, Wolfe said, the resignation of Dr. Ristich was not imminent.

Dr. Ristich acknowledged yesterday that there had been disagreements between him and Dr. Keill. "We don't have any problems other than honest differences of opinion," he said.

Dr. Keill described Dr. Ristich as a "warm, decent human being," but would not give an opinion on the quality of the job Ristich has done in his two-year tenure at Willowbrook.

"All I'll say is that Willowbrook is a helluva lot better today than it was two years ago," he said.

Dr. Ristich came to Willowbrook in June 1972, succeeding Dr. Jack Hammond, who at his own request was transferred to an upstate institution for the mentally retarded. Dr. Hammond served at Willowbrook for six years.

Educated in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and London, Dr.

Ristich was director of Cambridge (Minn.) State Hospital before coming to Willowbrook.

He was officially appointed director of Willowbrook Oct. 5,

1974.