

State aide reportedly asked Willowbrook chief to resign

By ROBERT MIRALDI

The regional director for the state Department of Mental Hygiene asked for the resignation of the director of Willowbrook Developmental Center on Sept. 9, sources close to the situation have said.

Dr. Miodrag Ristich of Willowbrook reportedly was asked by Dr. Stuart L. Keill to present his resignation to the state commissioner because he was an "incompetent administrator."

Dr. Ristich refused, saying that he did not feel he was incompetent and that he felt he was doing the job at Willowbrook.

The sources made it quite clear that the request for Dr. Ristich's resignation had no connection with proceedings that have taken place in Brooklyn Federal Court. The Advance revealed last week that pressure was being put on Dr. Ristich to resign.

Meanwhile Anthony Pinto, president of the Willowbrook Benevolent Society, blasted Dr. Ristich yesterday as a "terrible administrator" who has brought "no cohesion or coordination" to the staff at Willowbrook.

Pinto acknowledged that the pressure has been on Dr. Ristich to resign. He said that Dr. Keill as well as administrators in Albany are seeking the resignation.

When reached for comment, Dr. Keill would not comment on the report that he had asked for the Ristich resignation Sept. 9.

"I think Dr. Ristich is doing the very best job that he is capable of," Dr. Keill said.

Is that job good enough to satisfy you, Dr. Keill was asked. "No comment," he said.

Dr. Keill admitted that he has had disagreements with Dr.

Ristich over the administration of Willowbrook. But, he said, "I have disagreements with many professional people."

Dr. Keill, the sources said, is now convinced that no further progress will be made at Willowbrook until—and unless—Dr. Ristich is removed as director.

Dr. Keill became regional director in April. Previously he had worked for the Department of Mental Hygiene as an associate commissioner for regional services.

When he took over as regional director, overseeing all local state institutions, including Willowbrook, he took his staff on extensive tours of all state facilities.

He was upset at what he found at Willowbrook, the sources said.

The sources said that Dr. Ristich was not familiar with many of the people working on his staff. Dr. Keill would neither confirm nor deny that allegation.

Pinto, however, said there are a number of key people at Willowbrook that Dr. Ristich cannot deal with on a personal level because of unfamiliarity.

"No one knows who's going where," Pinto said. "He's done nothing to coordinate the efforts of his staff. People have never been brought together."

"He has never done a thing to coordinate services," Pinto said.

Pinto said that if there was to be a cardiac emergency at Willowbrook tonight, no one would know what to do. "There are no emergency procedures."

"He is forcing certain requirements on the staff which they don't like. The unit chiefs are unhappy," he said.

"With the background he has," Pinto added, "I can't honestly understand. He knows all the things that are wrong

but doesn't do anything about them."

Pinto compared Dr. Ristich to his predecessor, Dr. Jack Hammond. "Both were poor administrators," said Pinto, who has been president of the benevolent society which represents the patients, for three of the last four years.

Pinto feels that Dr. Ristich could be brought up on charges—if the state wanted. He did not feel that it is necessary, however. He said he also feels Dr. Ristich is "being put under certain restraints from state administrators."

"Otherwise," he said, "I can't see a man of his background doing what he's been doing."

The sources said that Dr. Keill feels it is only a matter of time before Dr. Ristich resigns. There already has been some talk of setting up a search committee for a successor.