

State Seeking to Replace Director of Willowbrook

By MURRAY SCHUMACH

The state's Department of Mental Hygiene is seeking a replacement for Dr. Miodrag Ristic, director of Willowbrook, the state institution for the retarded on Staten Island.

Strong pressure has been brought on Dr. Alan D. Miller, the head of the state agency, to transfer Dr. Ristic, in the wake of hearings in Federal Court in Brooklyn that have disclosed allegations of mistreatment of patients and of many continuing inadequacies.

Dr. Miller refused to comment on reports about Dr. Ristic's future in the state system, except to say that he had not requested the director's resignation and that it had not been offered.

Dr. Ristic said, through a representative, that Commissioner Miller had assured him yesterday afternoon that his resignation was not being requested.

About the possibility of transfer, he said: "Transferral is never out of the question. Anyone who is in a position like mine has some ideas that he should be somewhere else. This job is no bed of roses. I came here to do a job. I think I am doing it. There is more to do."

Important officials in the department confirmed reports that the state agency was dissatisfied with Dr. Ristic, who has been director since 1972. He took over the job after revelations of shocking mistreatment of patients at Willowbrook.

People close to Dr. Miller said that a successor would not be named until community leaders had been sounded out on those being considered for the job.

Well-informed people at the state agency said that even before the Federal Court hearings on Willowbrook began last week, there had been displeasure with Dr. Ristic's administration of Willowbrook.

The hearings were on a suit seeking the transfer of the 3,500 residents of Willowbrook to

their own homes, foster homes, halfway houses or other smaller residential units.

At the hearings, before Federal Judge Orrin G. Judd, parents and experts in the field have alleged that the institution brings about serious deterioration of patients.

"I have never seen a facility in which inadequacy was so widespread," Dr. Earl C. Butterfield, professor of pediatrics and a director of the Ralph L. Smith Center for Research in Mental Retardation and Human Development at the University of Kansas, told the court.

In response to an order by Judge Judd, the number of residents has been reduced by 3,000 during Dr. Ristic's administration. At the same time the number of employes has been increased, and there are now almost as many employes as patients.

Early this year State Senator Frank Padavan, Republican-Conservative of Queens, charged that reported rapes, robberies, assaults and burglaries at Willowbrook were more frequent in 1973 than in 1972.

Last month a group of parents of the retarded at Willowbrook held a protest there and said that a number of employes at the institution with criminal backgrounds had threatened and intimidated other members of the staff.

Dr. Ristic, who is 36 years old, received his medical degree at the University of Belgrade, in Yugoslavia, where he interned. He received psychiatric training at Severall Hospital, in Colchester, England, and got a diploma in psychological medicine from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, in London.

Before joining Willowbrook, as deputy clinical director, he was medical director at the Cambridge (Minn.) State Hospital for three years. He was named director at Willowbrook on Oct. 5, 1972.