

## Willowbrook director transferred

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Dr. Miodrag Ristich, director of Willowbrook Developmental Center, has been transferred to a senior research post with the state Department of Mental Hygiene, it was revealed yesterday.

Dr. Ristich, who had been Willowbrook director for two years, confirmed the move last night. He said he was "quite pleased" with his new assignment at the Institute for Basic Research on Mental Retardation, also in Willowbrook. His salary is expected to remain about \$43,000.

Early today it was announced that James A. Forde, the director of the state Department of Mental Hygiene's M.d.-Hudson Regional Office, has been appointed "acting director" of Willowbrook for three months.

Forde, a former associate commissioner for executive coordination for the department, will head a team of "senior officials of the State Department of Mental Hygiene who will be assuming responsibility for the next three months for the administration of Willowbrook," according to Howard Wolfe, Assistant Commissioner for Communications for the State Department of Mental Hygiene.

The Advance first revealed a week ago that Dr. Ristich was under some pressure to leave his director's post.

Dr. Ristich denied yesterday, however, that he was pressured out of Willowbrook. "I was not pressured at all," he said. "Additional responsibility tends to accumulate liabilities.

"I have become increasingly occupied with the kinds of things that were defensive, rather than doing something that was positive.

"That is the major reason I left," he said. "Everything else is peripheral."

Dr. Ristich was contacted Monday by Dr. Alan Miller, state commissioner. He was in Albany yesterday to meet with Dr. Miller, and the details of his transfer were worked out.

Dr. Ristich said the major problem he has encountered at Willowbrook has been dealing with the public. He said the tremendous problems at Willowbrook were soluble "if certain things happen in the community."

Dr. Ristich said that he was not at all bitter about what has happened at Willowbrook, but that he had become tired of dealing with the "basic issues . . . like laundry, food service and ward coverage."

He called his new post "attractive" and said he was glad to be returning to the clinical aspect of helping the mentally retarded. "If I stay at Willowbrook for another two years," he said, "I might still be dealing with the same basic issues.

"Research is what I prefer to do."

Dr. Stuart L. Keill, city regional director for the Department of Mental Hygiene, told the Advance last week that Dr. Ristich was administratively "over his head." His specialty, he said, was clinical application.

Dr. Ristich defended his two years at Willowbrook, however. "It is a matter of record," he said, "that things were accomplished."

He said the "real problems" that must be faced at Willowbrook now are its size, the labor problem, its location and needed technological transformations.

"The problems are certainly soluble," he said.

The institution of halfway houses in the community, he suggested, would be the best way to solve Willowbrook's problems.

"I'm sure," he concluded, "that my successor will do more than I have because time is on our side. Without time to recruit and train the staff, money isn't going to do the

trick. Even if the resources come to Willowbrook, it will take time to do the job."