

Willowbrook director appeals for trust

By SUSAN FRY

The interim director of the Willowbrook Developmental Center arrived yesterday on the grounds of the institution to begin sorting out what he called "problems of management."

James A. Forde, a holder of degrees in public administration, will head a team of management consultants and high level deputies in the state Department of Mental Hygiene in a full-scale effort to pinpoint and weed out problems which have plagued Willowbrook for years.

In an interview immediately upon his arrival yesterday by plane at Newark from upstate Forde seemed hopeful that during his three-month stay he will have some success in synchronizing policy, programs and personnel.

"There are a lot of things, I think, that are working for us now that I will try to put together in an effective manner," said Forde, who is director of the department's Mid-Hudson Region.

He noted that with the help of department officials and the San Francisco-based management consultant firm of Griffenhagen-Kroeger, retained by the state about two months ago, "we can make some real strides."

In addition, he said, the State Legislature recently provided funds for 100 per cent support for mental hygiene services to persons who have been in state institutions for five years or more, which represents about 90 per cent of the Willowbrook population.

Included in that legislative package was an amendment to the Social Services Law, which Forde said provides for "full state support" of community facilities which former institutionalized residents might use.

"This is something we can take advantage of because the state has committed itself to



James A. Forde, interim director of Willowbrook Developmental Center, surveys the institution where he will work with management consultants for three months.

S.I. Advance Photo by Barry Schwartz

provide these services, and the new legislation requires cooperation between the city and voluntary agencies."

A former associate commissioner of the department for all its psychiatric and developmental centers, Forde indicated a desire to develop training programs for Willowbrook personnel.

Noting problems in turnover "which effect inservice training and orientation programs," he said the "key is to try to have

employees who are satisfied with their jobs, who feel they are making a contribution, who have success, stay on and become valued long-term employees.

"One of the things I have to work on is trust, to get people to trust me, to know that I really care about the residents, that I really care about the staff."

He said a major priority will be meetings with middle-management personnel, parents and "as many ward aides as possible."

"I think that if we put all of the people together who are concerned and interested in a manner that will foster some success, we've got to do better."

Although conceding that the three-month time limit is not adequate to implement all programming for residents, Forde said he would encourage ideas and developments.

"Programming is what we're here for and what the residents are here for. We have people on the staff who are capable of doing these things and should be trained to do so."

In discussing the state's long-range plan to move residents of large institutions into community settings, he indicated

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that services have not yet been effectively coordinated for their care.

"It's very easy to say that all you have to do is put people in community residences and programs, when the programs don't exist yet.

"How do you balance the two; because by the same token, we're being clobbered in the other division of mental health, which is releasing people into the community where the resources don't exist.

"We can't take any precipitous action in releasing people from Willowbrook where the community services aren't

there. Believe me, there's nobody more anxious than the department (of Mental Hygiene) to see Willowbrook reduced to manageable proportions so that we can take care of those we have in institutions, as well as those on the outside."

He said the department is currently trying to find family care homes, proprietary homes which require the follow-up of the department, clinic care and activity programs so more institutional residents can be released.

At the height of renewed hearings in Brooklyn Federal Court, in which the state Association for Retarded Children and others are seeking relief for residents of Willowbrook, the former director, Dr. Miodrag Ristich was transferred to the position of clinical research scientist for Basic Research in Mental Retardation.

A new director has not yet been selected. Forde said, however, he would not accept the position if it is offered.

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