

# Willowbrook aide tells of rodent filth

By SUSAN FRY

Mice and roaches have infested a residential building of the Willowbrook Developmental Center, according to a mid-level supervisor who testified under subpoena yesterday in Brooklyn Federal Court.

The supervisor, whose name was withheld from public record, told Judge Orrin G. Judd that the rodents have been uncontrollable in the building.

On one occasion, she said, two mice crawled out of pockets in her jacket, and a mouse was also found in a nurse's syringe.

"If bread is left out in the kitchen, it is usually partially eaten by mice. And if remaining pieces aren't thrown out immediately, they are eaten by the residents," she claimed.

The woman also said a report she had read indicated that a resident had eaten a mouse. Roaches, she said, are "everywhere, crawling over toothbrushes."

She also testified that residents eat food that has been spilled on the floor of the dining hall and out of "leaking" garbage cans.

In discussing the conduct of ward attendants in her building, the supervisor said she has detected the odor of alcohol on their breath and found an empty bottle of vodka in her desk.

"We also have some (attendants) who are on drugs," she claimed, adding that when some attendants are "counseled" by supervisors, their retribution includes verbal threats, sliced automobile tires and smashed windshields.

The supervisor also described filthy conditions, and lack of adequate clothing, cleaning fluids, furniture and food in her building.

In other testimony, Dr. Sita

Krishna, medical physician for Building 77, told Judge Judd that 30 per cent of the building's resident population has had hepatitis, according to a recent survey she conducted.

Dr. Krishna also cited a "high incidence" of other infectious diseases prevalent in the building.

A Willowbrook physician for two years, she claimed that when she complained about filthy conditions, they were "taken care of in a temporary fashion."

She said when doctors are assigned to night duty, they work a "straight 24-hour shift."

"When I am tired during this shift, my decisions may not be the best," she said, adding that there is only one doctor on duty from 4:30 p.m. through 8:30 a.m. for the entire Willowbrook population of about 3,000.

Dr. Krishna, who also testified under subpoena, explained that consulting services to physicians are not adequate for the population, citing one instance last year when she ordered electroencephalograms for several residents which have not yet been administered.

She said, however, that since the ratio of nine residents to one clinical staff member was instituted two years ago, the number of accidents has been "markedly reduced."

The president of the Benevolent Society, Anthony Pinto, explained in testimony incidents surrounding the death of a 25-year-old resident Tuesday evening.

Pinto said he learned during conversations with ward staff of Building 20, where the man died, that he had choked from bread lodged in his throat.

"The resident was known to be a fast eater and choked frequently. He had been treated

for this problem at the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital," he said.

According to Pinto's testimony, the resident was on his way back to the ward after eating dinner when he grabbed slices of bread and stuffed them in his mouth.

An attendant was unable to remove the bread from the resident's mouth since he had locked his jaws. The resident was pronounced dead at 6:25 p.m.

Pinto added that Building 20 was frequently short of food for long periods of time. Tuesday night, he said, it was short 23 trays, and dinner consisted of mashed potatoes, bread, cake and gravy instead of a scheduled menu of pork, carrots, macaroni, pudding, milk and coffee.

He also said that during August two other residents had choked to death in a period of one week.

Marie Moore, national advocacy coordinator for United Cerebral Palsy and a specialist on the care and management of the multiple handicapped, testified that, during a visit to Willowbrook two weeks ago, she found very little "adaptive" equipment for multiple handicapped residents.

She also said that few persons appeared to be qualified to work with the handicapped residents and was told by ward aides, "We know we have problems, but no one has shown us what to do."

One therapist told her, Miss Moore said, that she was using traditional methods of therapy because there was no planning or exceptional skills.

The third day of continued hearings were concluded

yesterday and are expected to resume Nov. 21 when defendants — New York State and others — will present their case. Counsel for defendants is an assistant attorney general.

On behalf of the New York State Association for Retarded Children in a class action, the case was brought by the New York Civil Liberties Union and the Legal Aid Society. The U.S. Department of Justice is also part of plaintiff's suit, in which the constitutional right to treatment is being sought for Willowbrook residents.