

Willowbrook death ruled an accident

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Police have concluded that the death of Jaime Rivera, an 18-year old resident of Willowbrook Developmental Center who died Oct. 11, was "strictly accidental."

Detective Charles Ackerman said yesterday that he has found "no evidence" of homicide or other abuse in the death of Rivera.

Parents and relatives of Rivera have charged that the boy was murdered. "I think he was killed," Sylvia Rivera, the boy's sister said at a rally Sunday at Willowbrook.

Detective Ackerman however, said that he was "pretty well satisfied" that the

death was accidental. "I went into this very thoroughly," Ackerman said about his month-long investigation in which he questioned the Rivera family, Willowbrook attendants and residents.

The medical examiners report showed that Rivera had died "most likely" from a fall, Ackerman said. "There is nothing to show that he was made to fall," he added.

The medical examiner confirmed earlier reports that Rivera had died from a fracture at the base of his skull.

Ackerman said that his investigation was hampered by the lack of eyewitnesses. He did, however, speak with a number of residents who lived in the ward near Rivera.

The Rivera family has contended that they have received conflicting information from ward aides who were present at the time of the death. Ackerman labeled the conflicting reports "only rumors." "Unfortunately," he said, "rumors start to spread. Anything that is said begins to mushroom."

While police were attempting to put to rest rumors about the death of Rivera, Willowbrook officials responded yesterday to charges that were made Sunday by about 30 protesting parents.

Parents told the Advance that one of Willowbrook's physicians, Dr. Bernard Goodman, had been barred from certain buildings because of his "nasty behavior," that a ward attendant had died of an overdose of heroin three weeks ago and that another had verbally abused and threatened two parents when they came to pick up their child at Willowbrook.

A Willowbrook spokesman denied yesterday that there was "any basis" for the charges.

According to Dr. Rangasamy Natarajan, deputy director for clinical services, Dr. Goodman has not been restricted from any area or building at Willowbrook.

Dr. Natarajan denied that three nurses had quit because of Dr. Goodman, as parents had contended. The nurses' supervisor said yesterday that two nurses had left because of marriage and the other had moved.

Spokesman Joyce Libra said there has been no employee deaths in Building 29, as parents had charged, in two months.

Responding to a question on drug abuse among employees at Willowbrook, acting director James A. Forde said, "I would assume that we have the same among our employees as exists in the surrounding area."

Concerning the alleged dispute between an attendant and Mr. and Mrs. James Alexander of Mariners Harbor, Miss Libra conceded that "there were words exchanged which started from a misunderstanding."

She said that there has been "on going communication" between the Willowbrook administration and Alexander. "It has been cleared up," Miss Libra said.