

800 Willowbrook residents to move to other facilities



Dr. Kolb is briefed by Dr. Rangasamy Natarajan, left, director of clinical services at Willowbrook. Behind the commissioner is Donald Fleming, deputy director of Institutional Administration.

Commissioner finds center is 'better than expected'

By TERENCE J. KIVLAN

Eight-hundred residents of Willowbrook Developmental Center will be transferred to other state mental institutions over the next year and one-half, the new commissioner of the state Mental Hygiene Department announced yesterday.

"That should make this facility better staffed than any state school," Lawrence Kolb told reporters at a Willowbrook press conference just after touring the troubled Staten Island institution for the first time as commissioner.

Willowbrook has 2,878 residents and a staff of more than 3,200. Officials said that most of the transferees are destined for Manhattan, Queens and Brooklyn developmental centers.

Kolb also told reporters that the conditions he saw during his two and one-half hour inspection of Willowbrook were "better than expected." He added, however, that he did notice signs of overcrowdedness, poor employe morale, and bad management.

He said that most of the employes were obviously "interested and well qualified." But then he said that about 10 per cent of the staff was the cause of "unrest and concern."

Kolb went on to announce that the list of candidates to be the new director of Willowbrook had been narrowed to three and that a choice would be made soon. Each of the possible directors, Kolb emphasized, has solid manage-

ment experience.

Willowbrook officials acknowledged that one of the final three candidates—Harold F. Piepembrink, the superintendent of a Chicago institution—visited the institution Sunday to look at the director's residence. The other two contenders are Theodore F. Childs, a professor at Long Island University, and David Rosen, an administrator for a Detroit institution.

During yesterday's tour, Kolb seemed alternately pleased and dismayed with what he saw. In one building, which contained mostly children, he complimented the staff for its work and remarked that the wards appeared "attractive and well run."

But in two other buildings, which housed young male patients, he noted that the walls of the living units needed painting. And he became visibly annoyed in one of the buildings when an attendant did not know the location of the key used to lower the windows in the wards.

In a surprise visit to that same building on the evening of Jan. 24, two state Assembly members, Elizabeth Connelly and Angelo Del Toro found 25 residents sleeping with the windows left open. The temperature in the rooms was estimated at about 45 degrees. "It doesn't make sense, but these things happen," the attendant told Kolb yesterday.

Kolb encountered other Willowbrook ills when he made an

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