

Candidate for Willowbrook post under fire

By ROBERT MIRALDI

An internationally known authority on mental retardation yesterday blasted the apparent choice of Harold C. Piepembrink as the new director of Willowbrook Developmental Center.

Dr. Gunnar Dybwad, currently a visiting scholar at the National Institute for Mental Retardation in Toronto, Canada, yesterday told the Advance that Willowbrook "will continue to be a tremendous problem, will continue to be a facility with inadequate and inappropriate leadership."

The choice of Piepembrink is "strange indeed," Dybwad said, pointing to the new director's background as "woefully lacking" in experience in mental retardation.

Dr. Dybwad's comments came shortly before the state Department of Mental Hygiene tacitly confirmed from Albany that Piepembrink, a long-time mental health administrator in Illinois, will shortly become the fourth director in Willowbrook's history.

The department's director of communication, Harold Wolfe, said he could not officially confirm or deny that Piepembrink will be the next director.

Wolfe said that he could only confirm that Piepembrink is the "leading candidate."

An official at the Tinley Park (Ill.) Mental Health Center, where Piepembrink is presently administrator, revealed yesterday that Piepembrink had resigned that post Wednesday.

The Advance also learned that Piepembrink was on Staten Island Sunday to visit the Willowbrook grounds and to inspect the residence of former director Dr. Miodrag Ristic, where the new director will reside.

Piepembrink was not available yesterday at his Tinley Park office. His secretary could not confirm that he had resigned. "He may be headed somewhere else, but I don't know," she said.

Piepembrink's expertise lies in the field of mental health administration.

A Wisconsin native, Piepembrink holds a master's degree in hospital administration from Northwestern University. He was a business administrator at Manteno State Hospital in Illinois and held an administrative post at the District of Columbia General Hospital.

Piepembrink is currently president of the Association of Mental Health Administrators.

Dr. Dybwad said that he had never met Piepembrink but asked to "make a very simple point." "Has he done meaningful work in mental retardation," Dr. Dybwad asked.

"He has worked in mental illness, not mental retardation," Dybwad continued.

"As far as I am concerned, and you can quote me, it is indeed most peculiar that the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene would not be able to attract a man of greater competence in mental retardation."

Dr. Dybwad added: "I am in no way belittling his administrative leadership. But it takes a person with judgment and experience in the field of mental retardation" to run Willowbrook.

Dr. Dybwad, who has visited Willowbrook numerous times and testified in the recently ended court case brought by various parent groups against the state, is a former executive director of the National Association for Retarded Children.

Dr. Dybwad was the American chairman of the World Federation of Mental Health and is presently on sabbatical leave from Brandeis University in Waltham, Mass.

Anthony Pinto, president of the Willowbrook Benevolent Society, echoed Dr. Dybwad's statements. "We're on record objecting to his appointment," Pinto said yesterday. "We have a lot of confidence in Dybwad and share his concern."

"Of course," Pinto added, "we will work with Mr. Piepembrink although not necessarily concede anything to him."

Wolfe said from his Albany office that of Mental Hygiene Commissioner Lawrence C. Kolb was looking for a director who had "demonstrated a skill in administration of programs for the mentally disabled."

"Whether he had an MD, was a physician, or had long experience," was not Kolb's main concern, Wolfe said. Kolb was looking for a man who had demonstrated "man-

agerial skill," which, he said, is the major deficiency at Willowbrook.

Former Director Ristic was criticized toward the end of his two-year tenure as a poor administrator. He was transferred Oct. 9 to a senior research post at the Institute for Basic Research in Mental Retardation, Willowbrook.

Tinley Park Mental Health Center, where Piepembrink is administrator, deals with only the mentally ill. Piepembrink, however, did apply for a directorship at the William Howe Development Center, an institute for the mentally retarded, in Tinley Park in October, the Advance learned.

According to Hal Bostock, president of the center's parent group, Piepembrink withdrew his application because he "didn't like the idea of being interviewed by a 'lay' group."

Wolfe said that the official announcement of the next Willowbrook director would be made probably next Thursday.