

# Top Willowbrook MD quits: 'I have had it'

By ROBERT MIRALDI

The chief of medical affairs at Willowbrook Developmental Center, under fire for two years from three different directors, said yesterday that he has handed in his resignation to the center's new director.

"I have had it. I can't stand this anymore," said Dr. Rangasamy Natarajan, the 59-year-old India-born clinical director, one of the last remaining top-level officials from the days when the Willowbrook scandal was receiving national attention.

Natarajan was asked to resign Monday by Willowbrook director Dr. Levester Cannon, who said yesterday he "was concerned about types of complaints" he was receiving about medical services and that he "thought we should have a change."

Natarajan, refusing to take the blame for the center's medical woes, said the state Department of Mental Hygiene "is trying to throw the blame on the doctors."

However, since as far back as Feb. 11 the Willowbrook Review Panel, a court-appointed body, has been asking the department to hire a new medical director for the 2,595-bed institution for the retarded.

In its July report to a federal court which is overseeing changes at the center, the Review Panel underscored its desire for a medical shakeup and a new clinical director.

The report said the panel was "still far from confident that residents of Willowbrook are receiving the adequate and comprehensive medical care guaranteed them."

In its Feb. 11 letter, the panel asked Mental Hygiene Commissioner Lawrence C. Kolb to hire a new medical chief within a month and to reorganize the medical program within two months. Neither has been done.

The Department of Mental Hygiene had attempted to fire Natarajan in November 1975, but the clinician went into state Supreme Court and had his status as a permanent civil servant upheld.

"I've already spent \$5,000 fighting the department and I won't fight anymore," Natarajan said yesterday from his home on the grounds of the 386-acre center.

With Natarajan's position secure after his court battle, the state said it could not accede to the Review Panel's requests that Natarajan be fired, a reply which the panel said in a March 24 letter was "unacceptable."

The panel held to its position, however, and again told the Department of Mental Hygiene "to hire a highly competent person who would bring a different perspective to Willowbrook's medical program and...come up with new, effective solutions."

"It is at least doubtful that this can be accomplished by the same person who has been in charge of medical services for the past few years," the panel said of Natarajan.

"The need for improvement in the medical program remains critical," Dr. James Clements, panel chairman, told Kolb.

For his part, Natarajan has contended—and said again yesterday—that he has done



Rangasamy Natarajan

an adequate job with medical services at Willowbrook. "There is no stability in this institution. Cannon is not qualified to run this place," he said.

"I will not work under a non-medical man any longer," Natarajan said. Cannon has a doctoral degree in education and is not a physician which, according to Natarajan, is a must for the Willowbrook director's post.

Natarajan said that 80 per cent of Willowbrook's population is medically disabled and "the problem here is a medical one." Most of the center's residents "cannot go into the community to live," Natarajan said, a stance that is philosophically opposed to the federal court consent decree, which advocates the placement of almost all retarded persons in community facilities.

About the present medical services at Willowbrook, two medical sources agreed yesterday that "all you have to do is get into some of the horror stories about medical care" to evaluate it.

"Natarajan has just not given the proper training, information or guidance" to the 55 physicians and dentists on the Willowbrook staff, they claimed.

An independent evaluation of the center's medical services is due by the end of August when the Developmental Disabilities Center of Roosevelt Hospital in Manhattan is expected to issue a report on a month-long study it has conducted.

A spokesman for the hospital said yesterday that the "finishing touches" are being put on the \$5,000 effort.

Cannon said a search of the civil service lists will be initiated to locate a new medical director. As for Natarajan's resignation, Cannon said: "I am going to accept it."