

Carey's top health adviser, Willowbrook panel huddle

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Why is the top health adviser to Gov. Carey huddling today with the Willowbrook Review Panel?

Observers of Willowbrook Developmental Center and the state's mental health scene are having a field day answering that question. Some think the meeting might produce dramatic new developments; others think it's merely an exchange of ideas.

The meeting was requested by Dr. Kevin Cahill, the Carey adviser who has had a strong and constant hand in fashioning health policies for the governor who has made health policy reform a major goal of his administration.

The conference came to light last week in a federal court, and it came to light after the Willowbrook Review Panel had asked a federal judge to remove Carey's mental hygiene commissioner from command over Willowbrook, where progress has been steady but slow.

U.S. District Court Judge John R. Bartels will have to rule one way or another on the panel's request, unless, of course, Dr. Cahill comes up with an alternative that pleases the panel. Among the alternatives are:

☐ Cahill might tell the panel that the governor is intent on setting up soon a separate state bureaucracy to deal with the problems of mental retardation. Presently the state Department of Mental Hygiene handles both psychiatric and mental retardation problems.

☐ Cahill might just let slip that the present commissioner, Dr. Lawrence C. Kolb, is intending to resign and re-enter the teaching field where he was so successful and renowned. The panel and Willowbrook observers feel that Kolb hasn't done enough, fast enough at Wil-

lowbrook.

Kolb's expertise lies in the mental health — not mental retardation — field and he has had what he likes to call "professional" differences with the panel. Philosophically he is committed to the end of institutions and the beginning of community-based care.

☐ Cahill might accede to the panel's request that Carey appoint an expediter — one not employed by the state — to speed progress at Willowbrook. That possibility, however, is considered remote. It would be an embarrassment to Kolb and an admission by Carey that his first major appointee had failed.

☐ A final possibility, the most likely one, is that Cahill might just want to exchange ideas with the panel, hoping to appease the seven-member group, telling them that the governor has done all he can, that progress has been made, that further change in state officials might just slow the process.

A spokesman for the governor says that the meeting will produce no "major announcements" and is an "exchange of ideas" between the panel and Cahill, who, it seems, can speak for the governor in health matters.

When told of the spokesman's comments, one panel member said that if Cahill only wishes to "exchange ideas," then the governor "is going to be in trouble. We want solutions, not ideas," the panel member said.

It certainly should not be an adversary meeting because, most observers agree, Carey has shown a continuing

personal commitment to ending the scandal at Willowbrook and the other 20 state retardation centers.

While other state centers have had their budgets cut, Willowbrook's has been constantly increased, in part because of the demands of the federal court. Carey has twice visited Willowbrook, once as governor-elect and again three months ago.

His personal and monetary commitment is partly the reason why lawyers for parents have not named Carey for contempt of court for not implementing changes at Willowbrook. "He has not been a major obstacle," one attorney conceded.

Additionally, the attorneys feel, if Carey was named in the contempt action — like Kolb was — he would lose some of his flexibility and would have to defend what has happened — or not happened — at Willowbrook.

That flexibility, the attorneys hope, will allow him to continue to make changes at Willowbrook, changes, they hope, like making some one else beside Kolb responsible for the sprawling 2,600-bed home for the retarded.