

# Research institute wasteful, underutilized, Levitt says

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ALBANY — The \$7-million Institute for Basic Research in Willowbrook has been "substantially underutilized" since it was opened in 1967, state Controller Arthur Levitt charged yesterday.

Levitt, in a 27-page report on an audit of the Institute's operations through last May, also criticized the facility for employing its own kitchen, maintenance, safety and pharmacy help when it could have obtained the services from the nearby Willowbrook Developmental Center at a lower cost.

Dr. Henry Wisniewski, director of the institute, agreed that the research facility is not being used to its fullest potential but insisted the underutilization stems from the failure of state budget officials to earmark enough money for the center.

Wisniewski also contended that many of the shortcomings cited by Levitt could be tied to the fact that the institute was operating without a full-time director when the state audit was conducted.

Wisniewski was named director last July, the first person to hold that position since August 1973.

Levitt said about 25 per cent of the 83,200 square feet of laboratory space at the institute was not being used by state researchers when his auditors visited the facility last year, while another research center in Manhattan was overcrowded and had to rent extra space.

"It is true that if you come here you will see empty labs, but it's only because we don't have the staff or the budget the center was designed for," Wisniewski said.

Levitt also faulted the institute for duplicating services — such as food, maintenance and pharmacy — which could

be obtained less expensively from Willowbrook itself. In 1975-76, the controller said, the institute's eight maintenance employees spent only 23 per cent of their time actually working.

Wisniewski said he has attempted to work more closely with Willowbrook's staff in most cases, but he said the institute must maintain its own maintenance staff because much of its equipment is more modern and sophisticated than equipment at the developmental center.

Another item criticized by Levitt was the presence of 10 Willowbrook patients in the institute's residence wards while only one of them was actually involved in a research program.

"Since no educational, social service, occupational, recreational or physical therapy staff were available, the clients received only custodial care," Levitt said. "The result was that these severely disabled patients, aged five to 13, received costly care and little training."

Wisniewski said steps have since been taken to move patients not involved in research back to Willowbrook and added: "We don't want custodial cases here."

The controller's audit also criticized the institute for relying almost totally on state funding for operations while other Department of Mental Hygiene research centers encourage staff scientists to seek grants from the federal government and other private sources.

Between April 1973 and March 1975, Levitt said, only 10 grant applications were submitted by institute scientists and only four of those were approved.

Wisniewski said that since taking over last July, 30 grant applications worth a potential \$3 million have been submitted. None of those has been either accepted or rejected thus far, he added.