

## WILLOWBROOK HEAD TO TAKE POST IN OHIO

Dr. Levester Cannon Is Leaving  
Sept. 25—Cites Progress Made  
at Center in His Directorship

By PETER KIHSS

Dr. Levester Cannon, director of New York State's often controversial Willowbrook Developmental Center on Staten Island for the last 13 months, said yesterday that he would leave the center to become Ohio's Commissioner of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities on Sept. 25.

Dr. Cannon, who is 42 years old, said his move was "good professional advancement," even though it involves a pay cut from \$43,841 a year to \$41,056.

He said he was "very pleased with progress" at Willowbrook in such areas as overall quality of health services, programs for the retarded residents, quality of adult education and physical environment.

There has been "substantial progress in total staff available to work with residents," he said, and "I think we're making progress in improving relationships with the parents and community at large."

### Community Placement a Problem

But he said there were "still problems in terms of the flow of individuals for community placements" — a Brooklyn Federal Court order requires reducing the institution to 250 residents by April 30, 1978—and "we are still overcrowded."

There are now 2,300 residents at Willowbrook with a staff of 4,600, he said. One current problem is a suit by the institution's civil service employees seeking to block transfer of the administration of seven buildings, with 625 child patients, to United Cerebral Palsy of New York. The move for an injunction is to be heard in Federal District Court in Brooklyn on Thursday.

The State Department of Mental Hygiene's Metropolitan Placement Unit, under Barbara Blum, a deputy commissioner, said it had relocated 345 Willowbrook residents to foster and group homes in New York City since February 1976.

The agency said an agreement had led the state Urban Development Corporation's Roosevelt Island project to rent two apartments, starting late next month, to United Cerebral Palsy for a specialized family-care project for six adult patients

at Willowbrook. An earlier dispute had led to a complaint before the State Division of Human Rights, charging discrimination against the handicapped in the denial of a lease.

Christopher A. Hansen, attorney for the Mental Health Law Project, who helped win the Federal Court orders for decentralization, said yesterday that Willowbrook was "still not half way" in compliance with institutional changes that were supposed to take effect a full year ago.

### Some Difficulties Remain

Mr. Hansen said "compliance is going very slowly" on "environmental changes, amount of staff that needs to be hired and working, and the amount of programming to each resident." On community placements, he said, the effort was "proceeding fairly satisfactorily, and they seem to be quality placements."

For the Mental Hygiene Department, Thomas A. Coughlin, deputy commissioner, said he was "delighted that Dr. Cannon is experiencing this upward movement to a job in Ohio."

Willowbrook has had five directors since the court suit began in 1972—Dr. Miodrag Ristich, who left in October, 1974; James A. Forde, a state associate commissioner who was acting director for five months; Harold Pipenbrink, who served nine months and died of cancer in December 1975, and Dr. Coughlin, as acting director for four months before arrival of Dr. Cannon.

The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation said Dr. Cannon was "the first black to be named a commissioner" in the department, which is headed by a director, Dr. Timothy B. Moritz. Under the director are separate commissioners for mental retardation, mental health and forensic psychiatry.

Dr. Cannon, the department said, had been recommended by a search committee, which had considered 30 candidates from across the country. Dr. Cannon, who was born in St. Louis, earned his doctorate in education.

Before coming to Willowbrook, he was deputy director of the mid-Hudson region for the New York Department of Mental Hygiene. In Ohio, he will direct 10 state institutions with more than 6,000 residents, and 400 community centers. The state provided construction funds for the centers and the communities in which the centers are situated finance training and education to cope with retardation and disabilities.

A huge starlight concert and fireworks show was scheduled for last night for Willowbrook's residents, with music by a rock band and a 40-piece classical group.

The festival, sponsored by the institutional monthly publication, Reflections, and the parents' Willowbrook Benevolent Society, received donations of 2,000 hamburgers, 2,000 frankfurters, 900 Frisbees, 540 T-shirts, uncounted balloons, ices and ice creams and clown performers, along with raffle prizes.