

New Willowbrook chief may have a short reign

On Monday, Ella L. A. Curry will step into the top position at the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook. But Mrs. Curry, recruited from the state Correctional Services Department, may be putting only one foot in the door.

While many officials in the state Office for Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities expect Mrs. Curry's appointment to prevail, she has at this stage the indefinite status of acting director.

Mrs. Curry was chosen for the position by mental retardation Commissioner James E. Introne. Introne announced earlier this week that she would succeed the developmental center's director of three years, Elin M. Howe. Miss Howe has been named an associate commissioner for mental retardation, in charge of southeastern county community programs. She will be based in Albany.

But standard procedure in the Office for Mental Retardation dictates that a search committee will be formed to ratify the choice of a new director. The committee may consider candi-

dates besides Mrs. Curry.

"We'll all have a chance to try out the change before it is definite," Mrs. Curry said yesterday.

"I plan to be a stabilizing force," she said of her new position. Over the summer, disputes between management and labor resulted in work stoppages and the suspension of seven union officers at the institution, which provides care for about 1,060 mentally retarded residents.

Before becoming director of mental health programs for the Corrections Department, Mrs. Curry served as associate director of the state-run Bronx Psychiatric Center.

She came to New York in 1979 after serving as an administrator of two major mental health and mental retardation facilities in Illinois.

Mrs. Curry, who holds a doctorate degree from Union Graduate School in Yellow Springs, Ohio, was, while in Illinois, the first black woman ever named the director of one of the country's major mental health institutions, according to the Congressional Record.

— ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS