

10 Employees of State Hospital on S.I. Are Arrested on Drug Charges

By PHILIP SHENON

Ten employees at the state hospital at Willowbrook on Staten Island have been arrested and charged with selling cocaine, heroin and other drugs while on duty, the police said yesterday.

They said at least four other employees at the hospital — the Staten Island Developmental Center, a facility for the mentally retarded — were being sought on similar charges. The arrests, which came at the end of an 18-month investigation, began late Wednesday night.

The police said the employees sold the drugs to other hospital workers and to customers who traveled to the hospital. No drugs were sold to patients, the police said.

The center's director, Dr. Ella A. Curry, said at a news conference yesterday that the arrested workers had

been "directly involved with patient care" at Willowbrook, but that patients had not been harmed through mistreatment or neglect because of the suspected drug dealing.

The state facility, once called the Willowbrook State School, was the target of a series of investigations in the 1970's concerning patient care. It has about 1,900 employees and 1,100 patients.

Eight people were called from their posts and arrested at the hospital, the police said, while two others were taken into custody at their homes.

Sgt. Dennis V. Gill of the Brooklyn South Narcotics Squad, who led the investigation, said the remaining suspects would be arrested today or early next week. "None of the people we're taking into custody could be considered

big-time dealers, and they did not appear to be working together," he said. "They were dealing to other employees and to people who came in off the street who knew them."

He said the narcotics did not come from hospital supplies but were instead purchased by the employees from drug dealers who worked outside the facility.

Dr. Curry said she alerted law enforcement officials 18 months ago about her suspicion that employees were selling drugs. The hospital, she said, was unable to stop the drug traffic without outside help.

"This center is on 382 acres," she said. "It's not a prison. There's no way to keep people out who want the drugs."

Midge McGraw, community relations director for the State Office of Mental Retardation, said: "The administrators

at the facility have been doing a great deal to upgrade the quality of patient care. Now that these drug problems are being eliminated, we think the care will be even better."

Charged With Felony

The police said these people had been arrested and charged with the illegal sale of narcotics, a felony:

Penny Chavis, 25 years old, 178 Loughlin Ave., S.I.

Peter Etheridge, 40, 178 Loughlin Ave., S.I.

Jacob Gibens, 35, 50 North Burger Ave., S.I.

Theodore Handy, 40, 175 Trantor Place, S.I.

Gordon James, 28, 51 Arnold St., S.I.

Laverne Leverage, 35, 438 Avenue C, Bayonne, N.J.

Herman Mickens, 40, 1030 Post Ave., S.I.

Aida Rodriguez, 25, 197 Gordon St., S.I.

Maurice Valentine, 30, 91 Wayne Terrace, S.I.

James Ward, 38, 151 Webquahic St., Newark.