

KOPPANYI

+ Dr. Jos. F. FAZEKAS

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Sleeping Pill Addicts Pose Control Problem

2 Georgetown U. Doctors Point to Dangers in Drug

By Thomas R. Henry

There are at least 50,000 barbiturate addicts in the United States.

They are the folks who have formed an unbreakable habit of taking the barbital type of sleeping powders. Added to them are a far greater number of those who take the drugs quite regularly. Thus the country may be faced with another major drug problem.

This is the conclusion of Drs. Theodore Koppanyi and Joseph F. Fazekas of Georgetown University. In the past, they say, the habit-forming properties of barbiturates have not been fully recognized and they may have been prescribed indiscriminately by physicians.

"In contrast to the satisfied opium addict," the two report, "the satisfied barbiturate addict is usually more disoriented and physically and mentally less competent. He is often drowsy and confused. He may have emotional disturbances, occasionally severe depression and in a few cases infantilism and paranoid ideas.

Could Be Public Hazard

"The barbiturate addict, and to some extent the habitue, not only is accident-prone but constitutes a public hazard much the same as a chronic alcoholic. Probably the greatest danger is the possibility of acute poisoning when addicts miscalculate their daily requirement. They do not develop tolerance to the usual fatal dose. They may be amnesic and not remember the amount

they have taken. In addition, many individuals consider barbiturates an ideal suicide agent. It has been estimated that more than one out of each 2,000 hospital admissions is for acute barbiturate intoxication."

Despite the danger, Dr. Koppanyi says, there is an indispensable place for barbiturates in medicine. To determine the kinds of cases in which they are being used, a questionnaire was sent to the medical schools of leading United States and Canadian universities. The replies indicate that they are being used to treat various sorts of nervous excitement for which there is no specific treatment, but sometimes without good reason.

In view of the dangers the two scientists urge that the drugs be prescribed in the smallest doses possible, only on a short term basis, and only when there is no other known treatment which could be equally effective. Refilling of prescriptions, they insist, should be controlled rigidly because it is not difficult to hoard sufficient amounts for suicide.

New Control Seen Needed

But, they say, control must rest very largely in the hands of physicians and pharmacists. Additional Federal laws would merely mean that the manufacture and sale of barbiturates would be driven underground and the number of surreptitious peddlers would be increased.

This underground traffic, they believe, could not be handled by the present narcotic agencies of the Government but would require an entirely new agency with a large staff of enforcement officers maintained at a high expense and probably the only result would be more barbiturate suicides.

The Georgetown doctors warn especially against use of these sleeping potions together with alcohol. Each tends to enhance the effect of the other.

Barbiturate addicts, they stress, require special treatments. The withdrawal symptoms are very much like those of alcohol withdrawal.