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VISTAS IN SCIENCE

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Tailor-Made Drug for Abnormal Mind

The tailor-made "mind drug" is now on psychiatry's frontier.

Introduction of these drugs during the past few years is considered one of the greatest break-throughs in treatment of the mentally disturbed. They produce far-reaching effects, but their mode of action is not understood—any more than are the brain mechanisms which produce the delusions and hallucinations of mental disease.

The possibility of drugs made to order for specific conditions now seems very good, since it is largely a matter of juggling the structure of molecules in the chemical laboratory and testing the new compounds thus produced for their precise action.

Some Dramatic Results

One of the most promising of these drugs has been chlorpromazine. By altering the side-chains attached to the nucleus a large number of new compounds can be obtained. At least five of these, tested at the Wyeth laboratories of Philadelphia, have been found quite effective.

Most notable of these is a still officially unnamed substance, for which the name promazine is proposed. It has been tested on 550 disturbed patients to date at the District of Columbia General Hospital. Here the mental cases are acutely disturbed—not long-term psychoses. Results, presented at a staff conference, were published today in the Journal of the District Medical Society.

Probably the most dramatic results, according to the reports of Drs. John D. Schultz and Joseph Fazekas of the hospital staff, have come in the treatment of delirium tremens and other acute conditions due to alcoholism. Here there appear to be definite advantages over drugs previously used.

Some of the patients fell asleep within a few minutes after injections, continued to sleep for five to seven hours, and awoke with no traces of the condition except for some tremor. In others there was a marked reduction in the characteristic hallucinations of the condition. The drug can be administered either by mouth or by injection, depending on circumstances. A notable difference between this and other drugs of the class is that only a light sleep is induced from which a patient can be aroused easily for questioning or fur-

ther treatment. Then he falls asleep again almost immediately.

The drug also has shown considerable promise. The experimenters reported in treatment of the extremely distressing withdrawal symptoms of drug addiction. Some of the patients slept or dozed during the entire three-to-seven-day treatment period with none of the customary complaints of severe nausea, cramps and muscle pains.

Rather fantastic have been the effects on some psychotic patients with hallucinations. In some cases these hallucinations have disappeared. In others they have remained, but the victim is no longer concerned with them.

"The devil still talks to me but I don't bother to holler back at him," one patient reported.

The drug, the experimenters report, apparently acts as a relaxant of the nervous system. In most cases there has been a moderate reduction in blood pressure and pulse rate, usually quite elevated at the start of treatment.

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