

body temperature and their pain-relieving properties.

Meproamate (Miltown, Equanil), 'happy pills' were at first thought to be non-addictive. In the early 1950's, they outsold ordinary headache tablets in the U.S. However, they can lead to addiction. The predominant effect of meproamate are those of a centrally acting muscle relaxant. The tension and anxiety caused by our computer society have forced many to seek this drug. In the U.S., for example, 35 million prescriptions for 4 billion 'tranquillizer' pills of the Miltown variety are written every year.

Barbituates comprise a large family of chemical substances all derived from barbituric acid. Barbital (Veronal), the first of 2500 types that have been developed, was introduced into medicine in 1903. Phenobarbital (luminal) came next. Today, there are 50 types marketed for clinical use. Medical uses are many. It is perhaps most often employed as a sleeping aid and anxiety reliever, though its enlistment as an anaesthetic and anticonvulsant is also of great importance. Insomnia seems to be a widespread American problem, for in 1954, 300 tons of barbituates were consumed in sleeping pills. In Canada, they are also widely used, and their illegal sale became so serious a few years ago that the government revised the Narcotics Control Act to cover the distribution of barbiturates. This action was initiated because of the increasing number of barbituate addicts--and deaths attributed to its misuse, for barbituates can produce all degrees of depression of the central nervous system, from mild sedation to deep coma and death. Some become addicted after using them legitimately as sleeping pills, then continuing their use after the prescribed dosage is taken.

A barbituate addict is worse off than a heroin or morphine addict, since the 'goof ball' processes. He seems dull, stupid, slow, disoriented, half-asleep. If he wishes to withdraw from the drug, he suffers dreadful deprivation effects, since his body has developed a physical dependency on the drug. Sudden withdrawal is not recommended; it often results in death. Gradual withdrawal is often dreaded more than death by addicts. Rapid illness sets in, characterized by violent epileptic convulsions, hallucinations, and agitation similar to the alcoholic's delirium tremens. So violent does this become that it sometimes leads to death from exhaustion. Normally, delirium ends after 5 days, but can last up to 2 weeks, or be halted abruptly before that--by the patient's death.

Barbituates are used by narcotic addicts when narcotics are not available, and by alcoholics as a substitute for alcohol. Known as 'red birds', 'yellow jackets' and collectively called 'goof balls' on the black market, their sale--like opiate, cocaine, and marihuana trafficking--is controlled beyond legitimate medical suppliers, by organized crime.

Often people drown not only their sorrows but themselves in ethyl alcohol. This depressant has a wide clientele. Eight million Canadians use it; 250,000 are addicted to it. More money is spent each year in the U.S. for what pharmacologists refer to as a 'protoplasmic poison' than on welfare services for its destitute millions.

Alcohol is not a stimulant, but a depressant; it may even have the effect of a general anesthetic. As a euphoriant, alcohol has a limited value. It is freely available, fairly cheap and, in moderation, does not harm the body. In fact, it even has a certain food value, being burnt up in the blood to liberate a modest number of calories. It is

not, in normal people, a habit-forming drug, and its effects are not cumulative if the body is given sufficient time to eliminate it. However, since inhibitions disappear rather easily in the alcoholic cycle, the body is not often given sufficient time. Anyone consuming over one pint of whiskey at one sitting is risking a coma, and, if he persists, a swift and painless death, as breathing and beating of the heart are stopped by paralysis of the brain area controlling them. But even in smaller amounts (less than 0.3% concentration in the blood) alcohol can have damaging effects. The stomach produces large amounts of gastric juice to dilute the alcohol to a tolerable concentration. This acidic juice often irritates the tender walls of the stomach, producing gastric ulcers. Concentrations of fat sometimes build up in the liver, impairing the vital function, and leading to cirrhosis of the liver. Nerve damage may occur in the addict's body, because of a lack of vitamins in alcohol. This may lead to Korsakoff's psychosis--insanity because of the deterioration of the nervous system. Delirium tremens, the alcoholic's withdrawal sickness, claims a 4-5% mortality under the best conditions. Vomiting, constant tremors, hallucinations, disorientation, and dehydration are its characteristics.

I mentioned that Canada has 1/4 million alcoholics. The Yale University Center of Alcohol Studies estimates U.S. alcoholics at 4 1/2 million, with California, and San Francisco (16,760 alcoholics per 100,000 adults) leading the list. Social and environmental conditions foster alcoholics; heredity seems to perpetuate it. Alcoholism could soon become North America's worst social and medical problem.

Next week: 1. The Hallucinogens  
2. Drugs and the Student.

to be Continued

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