

Synopses of Papers Awaiting Publication

Sedative or Tranquillizer? A Comparison of the Hypnotic Effects of Chlordiazepoxide and Amylobarbitone Sodium. By JOHN HINTON.

The equivalent doses of chlordiazepoxide and amylobarbitone sodium in the relief of anxiety have been estimated by Lader and Wing (1965). A double-blind trial of these drugs was conducted on psychiatric patients with insomnia to discover whether the same dose-equivalence held for their hypnotic action. Sleep assessments included EEG recordings and subjective ratings, the patients acting as their own controls.

Both drugs were hypnotics, but amylobarbitone sodium had a significantly greater effect than chlordiazepoxide when compared at the doses found equivalent for relieving anxiety. The hypnotic effect of chlordiazepoxide was not clearly related to dosage. The barbiturate decreased REM sleep, as expected, but chlordiazepoxide did not.

The difference in actions of these two drugs is discussed briefly in terms of the site of action and the relief of insomnia by alleviating anxiety.

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Sleeping Pills and Dream Content. By HUGH FIRTH.

There is some evidence that rapid eye movement sleep periods (REMPs) with many eye movements are associated with active, 'intense' dreams. Most hypnotic drugs reduce both time spent in REMPs and eye movement activity within them. Hence it was predicted that sodium amylobarbitone and nitrazepam would make dreams less 'intense', and their withdrawal would make them more intense.

Twenty subjects underwent baseline (placebo), chronic administration (amylobarbitone, nitrazepam, or placebo), and withdrawal (placebo) conditions. Dream reports were collected from awakenings after seven minutes of the second and fourth REMPs on nights under each condition. Subjective estimates of dreaming were made every morning. Various quantitative measures of dream content were made.

Contrary to prediction, dreams from baseline, drug and withdrawal were virtually indistinguishable, although both drugs greatly reduced eye movement activity. There were, however, two effects of interest. Nitrazepam dreams were everydayish and its withdrawal made them bizarre. Amylobarbitone

subjectively led to exceptionally vivid dreams and nightmares at home during withdrawal. Thus, although drug effects on dream content were not as great as predicted, withdrawal of drugs did lead to abnormal dreaming, with nightmares following barbiturate withdrawal.

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Poisoning Cases: Suicide or Accident. By B. M. BARRACLOUGH.

The frequency distributions of drugs causing deaths classified as suicide, accident or undetermined, between 1968 and 1970, have been compared. The distributions are similar, with some minor exceptions. Explanations for the similarities are discussed, including the possibility of 'non-suicide' poisoning cases being misclassified as suicides.

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A Hundred Cases of Suicide: Clinical Aspects.

By B. M. BARRACLOUGH, JANE BUNCH, B. NELSON and P. SAINSBURY.

One hundred suicides were investigated retrospectively by interviewing surviving relatives and examining relevant medical records. Mental illness was diagnosed in 93 per cent, 83 per cent suffering from depressive illness or alcoholism. Eighty per cent were seeing a doctor and the same proportion were prescribed psychotropic drugs. Over half had spoken of suicidal thoughts or intentions. Some suicides may be preventable with modern psychiatric treatment, but our investigation showed that these methods are not always effectively deployed.

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Platelet Serotonin of Hyperactive School Age Boys. By J. RAPOPORT, P. QUINN, N. SCRIBANU and D. L. MURPHY.

Platelet serotonin was measured in a sample of 35 hyperactive grade school boys participating in a study of imipramine and methylphenidate treatments and 19 controls. Serotonin measures did not differentiate patient and control group, nor familial hyperactives from other patients. Imipramine treatment was associated with a reduction of platelet serotonin