

MEDICINE—PSYCHIATRY

Psychogenic Rheumatism

Symptoms diagnosed as arthritis or allied conditions in 450 soldiers thought to be largely the manifestation of mental or emotional conflicts.

➤ A GOOD MANY persons, laymen as well as physicians, are recognizing more and more that certain disturbances in the digestive system, even including stomach ulcers, may be caused by mental and emotional influences. Relatively few, however, appreciate that the same mental and emotional influences may cause symptoms of arthritis or rheumatism.

"Psychogenic rheumatism" is the name given this condition by Capt. Edward W. Boland and Col. William P. Corr, of the Army Medical Corps. (*Journal, American Medical Association*, Nov. 27)

It was, they report, the most frequent cause of disability in 450 consecutive soldier patients they saw whose condition had been diagnosed as arthritis or allied organic condition before they were admitted to Hoff General Hospital at Santa Barbara, Calif.

Symptoms included backache and pain, stiffness, and a feeling of swelling or limitation of motion in the joints and muscles. In a special study of 50 of these soldiers, the medical officers found in 28 of them no objective evidence of muscle or joint disease; that is, X-ray pictures and various tests failed to show any condition in the joints or muscles that could account for the pain and disability.

The two medical officers do not believe, as some doctors do, that mental and emotional conflicts can cause inflammation of the joints or organic joint disease, such as chronic rheumatoid arthritis. They do believe that in some cases psychogenic rheumatism, besides occurring without organic change, may be superimposed on non-disabling organic changes.

Most of the 50 soldiers who were specially studied had definite signs of mental and emotional conflict before entering military service. Many gave a history of sleepwalking, nightmares, temper tantrums or other symptoms of behavior problems.

These soldiers with psychogenic rheumatism might be mistaken for malingerers. Captain Boland and Colonel Corr state that the comment is frequently

heard that many of these patients are malingerers and should be made to return to work.

In the soldiers, the psychogenic rheumatism most frequently affected the back or legs. This might represent an unconscious attempt to solve the emotional conflict over military service by developing a disability that would make them unfit for duty and result in discharge from the service. In civilians, psychogenic rheumatism might similarly affect the part of the body representing the kind of work over which there was an unconscious conflict, such as the fingers and hands in a mechanic, typist or seamstress.

This does not mean that the patient is malingering in the true sense of the word, nor does it mean that he should be made to continue with the work.

Malingering, the medical officers point out, involves the conscious feigning or pretending an illness to avoid duty. In the Army it is punishable by court-martial. In their experience, true malingering has been uncommon in contrast to the frequency with which bodily symptoms "develop unconsciously as a means of escape from the unpleasant things associated with military service."

It is usually difficult for a lay person, and sometimes for a physician to distinguish between true malingering and this unconscious development of symptoms that disable a person for unwanted, difficult or unpleasant work. In or out of the Army, the patient should be seen by a physician specially qualified, by training and experience, to detect the difference between malingering and the unconscious conflicts that cause physical symptoms.

The patient with psychogenic rheumatism, the medical officers point out, needs psychotherapy, not physical therapy, to help him recover. Some of the soldier patients did recover under suitable psychotherapy. Others were found to be emotionally unfit for military service, though with proper treatment they might be able to live successfully as civilians.

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STRAIGHT LINES TO CURVES—
Since seamless steel tubing was impossible to get, engineers at McKinnon Industries Ltd., in Ontario devised the method of making the tubing by bending flat steel stock, welding the ends, then boring out the body. The picture shows the steel being bent into shape after cutting.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Influenza Increases Suddenly in Four States

➤ A SUDDEN increase in influenza during the week ending Nov. 27 appears in figures reported to the U. S. Public Health Service. Total number of cases for that week, latest on which national figures are available, was 2,462. For the previous week the total was 1,734, and for the last week in November, 1942, the total was 1,854, which was the five-year median figure.

More than one-half the influenza cases in the nation were reported from Texas, where influenza cases have been running high all summer, Minnesota and Virginia. Minnesota reported an increase from one case the week of Nov. 20 to 270 cases the week ending Nov. 27. A similar big jump in cases, from none Nov. 20 to 149 Nov. 27, was reported by Missouri. Cases in South Carolina increased from 295 to 331, in Virginia from 168 to 259.

In spite of the increase in cases, there is said to be no definite indication yet of a widespread epidemic.

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