

MEDICINE

Drugs Fight Mental Ills

The concensus of psychiatrists, selected from the membership of the American Psychiatric Association, is that tranquilizers are an important advance in treating the mentally ill.

► TRANQUILIZING DRUGS are a major advance in the treatment of mental illness and the alleviating of the major medical and social problem of maintaining mental health.

This is the opinion of psychiatrists selected from the membership of the American Psychiatric Association and asked to answer, anonymously, questions in a SCIENCE SERVICE Grand Jury inquiry. Approximately one percent of the 10,000 members were chosen methodically and polled to give good distribution throughout the nation. More than half responded.

There was an overwhelming affirmative answer to statement: "Significant progress is being made in mental disease treatment." The vote was: "Yes" 89% (47); "no" 9% (5); not voting, 2% (1).

As to whether tranquilizing drugs are a major advance, the poll showed: "Yes" 66% (35); "no" 28% (15); not voting, 6% (3).

When asked if, as a consequence of the new advances, mental hospital admissions will decrease in the future, the experts answered: "Yes" 45% (24); "no" 34% (18); not voting, 21% (11).

Looking into the future, the experts were asked if an as-yet-unknown chemical cure or cures for major mental illness will be found. The opinion was about evenly divided, with 47% (25) answering "no," 45% (24) answering "yes" and 8% (4) not voting.

Of those who believed that new cures might be found for major mental illness and were willing to guess when, 73% (16) judged that this is likely to occur before

1975. Only 9% (2) believed that such an advance might come before 1960, while 18% (4) gave as their judgment before 2000.

In the opinions of some experts who offered comments, the tranquilizers are not viewed as a "cure" but a useful advance in the management of psychotic patients.

One psychiatrist said they are a major step in helping treat grossly psychotic people, and that they convert the symptoms from a totally incapacitating illness to one more socially acceptable, but not more acceptable to the patient himself.

"Tranquilizers make the patient more comfortable and easier to live with in certain cases," another psychiatrist said, "but do not affect the mental disease process."

Another comment was:

"Not until all the etiological factors of both causation and pathology are determined, and not until the integrated efforts of the medical, social and psycho-social fields are implemented by combined political effort, will truly significant major progress occur."

Several psychiatrists pointed out that past life has a major influence in mental diseases which, as one observed, "are caused by emotional conflicts germinated at childhood and activated by the stresses of adolescence and later life." "Obsessing entities" and "the influence of past life memories on the present personality" were cited as major causes by another psychiatrist.

Chemistry may sedate or tranquilize but treatment essentially will remain as the adjustment of the individual by psychotherapy, was another expert's comment.

Another expert did not see how the

introduction of a chemical will modify a mental disorder any more than any injected substance could cause a man to change his religious beliefs or his political affirmations.

Among those who did not believe that mental hospital admissions would decrease, the following reasons were given:

The increase of our general population and the higher quota of aging people will ultimately result in more mental hospital beds required.

Perhaps beds for younger patients will be less needed but the older people will fill them up.

Psychiatrists who did not believe that chemical cures for mental illnesses would be found commented as follows:

The root of the mental disease problem is not chemical or physiological, and the drugs are only a solution to hospital logistics.

No chemical will bring about "cures" in illnesses with such complex etiology.

Mental illness has too many complex social and biologic roots to be cured by chemicals alone.

Science News Letter, November 1, 1958

OPTICS

Lighthouse-Like Lens Helps Near-Blind See

► THE LIGHTHOUSE has provided a clue to bringing vision to the near blind.

A unique kind of eyeglass with lenses similar to the ones found in lighthouses may bring vision to some of the nation's 500,000 partially blind persons.

The new triple-duty, tri-optic lens that has a magnification range of from 300% to 2,000% was described to scientists at the Western New York Society of Optometrists meeting in Buffalo. Dr. William Feinbloom, a consultant in sub-normal vision to the Optometric Center, New York, said the lens has been successfully used by 281 patients.

The eyeglass design was made possible by the incorporation of the Fresnel principle in three separate viewing sectors within a single lens. It fits standard eyeglass frames.

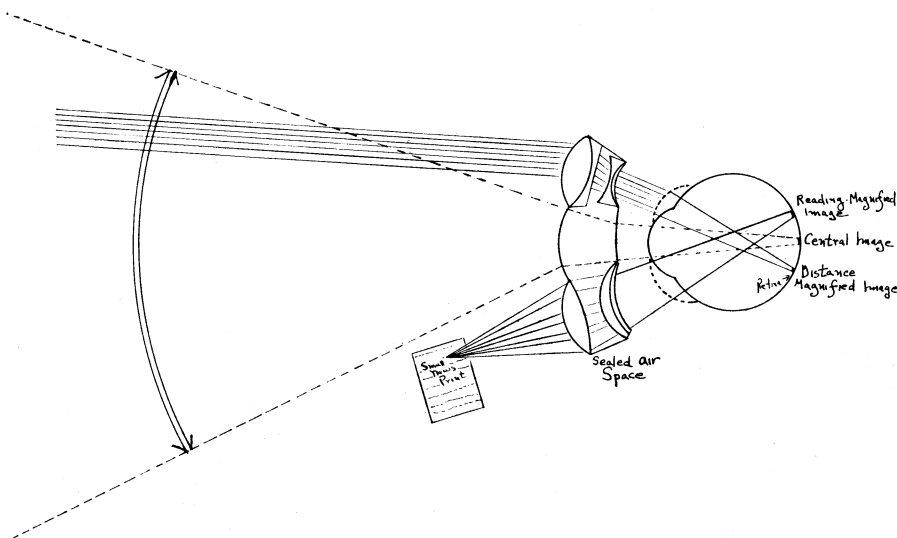
"The overall lens is made of clear, transparent plastic," Dr. Feinbloom said. "Embedded as the upper sector is a multiple lens system of eight optical surfaces that focus at infinity and produce 300% magnification.

"The center has two plastic curved surfaces and varied thickness to provide a full 120-degree field of vision so as to permit traveling about freely.

"The lower sector is a compound lens system, also embedded in the overall plastic lens. It is made up of from four to six lens surfaces with an air space, and produces up to 2,000% magnification for reading."

With the new system, the scientist explained, the partially blind eye performs like a normal one. Many of the young children fitted with the eyeglasses have been able to return to regular schools. Persons with partial blindness associated with diabetes, cataracts, high myopia and congenital causes have been restored to many of their normal activities, Dr. Feinbloom said.

Science News Letter, November 1, 1958



TRI-OPTIC LENS—The diagram shows the various fields of vision in which the new lens operates.