

MEDICINE

Morphine as Last Resort

► **TOO MANY** incurable patients become mentally disturbed because they are given morphine before their pain warrants it.

Newer drugs without hypnotic and other undesirable side effects can be substituted for the older pain killer, Dr. Raymond Gavin, consultant anesthetist in Taunton and South Somerset Group of Hospitals, England, said.

In the *British Medical Journal*, Dec. 31, 1960, Dr. Gavin lists five drugs that can rob cancer of much of its dread pain.

"Many of these drugs are specific analgesics (pain killers) and are almost without hypnotic action," he said. Under the influence of such drugs patients may be relieved of their pain while fully able to work or deal with business affairs.

"At times the hypnotic effect of morphine is highly desirable," he said, "but probably mostly in the terminal stages of pain from malignant disease." If morphine is given to patients too soon, he pointed out, "the last months of life are spent in disorientation

and uselessness, which is profoundly disturbing to their family and friends."

The five drugs Dr. Gavin listed as showing considerable promise in controlling extreme pain are oxycodone pectinate, dihydrocodeine bitartrate, levorphanol tartrate, methadone hydrochloride, and dextromoramide.

Prolonged administration of any pain killer, he said, often produces depression of mental activity, and much benefit can be gained from the use of amphetamine or methyl phenidate hydrochloride to elevate mood.

In the severe pain of primary or secondary cancer, Dr. Gavin said phenol, or carbolic acid, in five percent solution in lipid solvents such as glycerin or myodil has proved relatively safe. It is sometimes a remarkably efficient treatment especially in pelvic and lower-limb growths.

He advised the establishment of pain relief clinics such as are operating in Britain on a small-scale.

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MEDICINE

Sobering Up Alcoholics

► **A NEW METHOD** for sobering up alcoholics fast has been found—inject them with the thyroid hormone, L-tri-iodothyronine.

Use of the hormone to sober highly intoxicated persons within an hour or two is still in the experimental stage. The drug is not available to the public at the present time.

The thyroid hormone treatment is expected to be particularly valuable in hospitals where drunk patients who are unconscious may have been in an accident or the victim of an attack. When sober, they can give a medical history.

Use of L-tri-iodothyronine on 12 patients is reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, 263:1336, 1960, by Dr. Marshall Goldberg, Robert Hehir and Marc Hurowitz, all of St. Vincent's Hospital, Worcester, Mass.

They studied 20 patients who were chronic alcoholics. The alcoholics were selected at random from the alcoholic ward and 12 were injected with a solution prepared from sodium tri-iodothyronine powder. The remaining eight were untreated for comparison.

Most of the treated patients were declared sober within two hours after injection and were able to give a rational medical history. The researchers said the alcohol odor disappeared from the patients' breath within the two-hour period, while in the untreated patients it took six to ten hours for the alcohol odor to disappear.

A 45-year-old truck driver who was brought to the hospital in a semi-conscious state by a police ambulance after being found unconscious in the street was able to

sit up in bed fully oriented within one hour after receiving the injection. Within 90 minutes he was able to walk a straight line and hold out his hands without obvious tremor. Four observers could detect no alcohol on his breath.

Patients with known coronary-artery disease were excluded from the treated group because of the detrimental effect of circulating thyroid hormones on heart function.

The investigators point out that final conclusions cannot be drawn because of the small number of patients studied, and they suggest further research to verify their findings. They also advise using tri-iodothyronine as an adjunct to present treatments of alcoholics and not alone.

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PUBLIC HEALTH

Push Nation-Wide Health Insurance Program

► **THE AMERICAN** Medical Association has at least three general goals in mind in setting up a nation-wide voluntary health insurance program.

C. Joseph Stetler, director of AMA's legal and socio-economic division, said the AMA would try to include more persons in group coverage by encouraging employers to subscribe to available insurance plans.

The AMA also will push for a clause in insurance contracts stating that the insured cannot be dropped because he has reached age 65.

Members of AMA are also being encouraged to cooperate in programs similar to

those now used in about 35 states, in which doctors' fees are reduced for patients over 65.

Last May, Mr. Stetler and other spokesmen indicated that AMA would not propose solutions to the nation's medical problem before hearing reports from the White House Conference on Aging in January, 1961.

Action was taken before the conference, however, when AMA's policy-making House of Delegates noted that "Current social, political and economic developments compel a new and revitalized effort to make voluntary health insurance successful."

The result was a resolution directing AMA to consolidate its efforts with Blue Cross, Blue Shield and the American Hospital Association in advancing the "voluntary non-profit prepayment concept" of health insurance.

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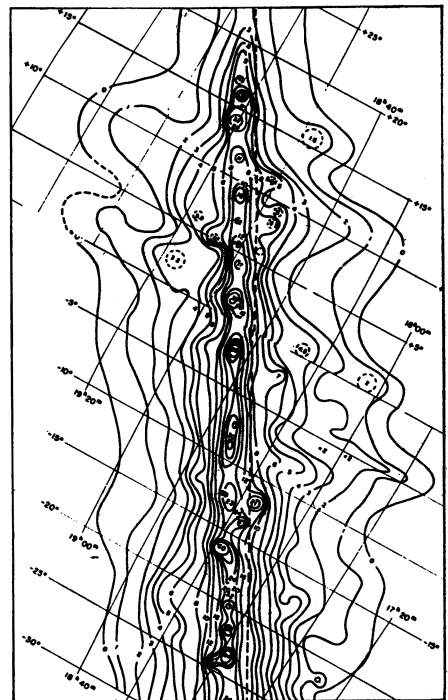
RADIO ASTRONOMY

More Than 50 Radio Stars Found by Observatory

► **MORE THAN 50** radio sources, many beyond the Milky Way galaxy, have been found by the new California Institute of Technology Radio Observatory, Pasadena, Calif. One aim of its observing program is to determine the mechanism responsible for the strong radio emission of some sources of radio waves.

On a map made of a section of the Milky Way, the configuration of the radio stars follows the visual patterns closely. The wiggly lines of this map may be compared with those of a topographical map, the lines from the outside toward the center representing increasing intensities of radiation.

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RADIO MAP OF MILKY WAY