

PUBLIC HEALTH

New Drug Threat Possible

Although the new Food and Drug Administration regulations may have reduced the risk of another thalidomide episode, new disasters may happen in the future—By Faye Marley

► THALIDOMIDE may be one of the simpler problems, looking back ten years from now.

The new Food and Drug Administration regulations may have "narrowed the threat," but offer no shield against another thalidomide episode, Dr. Lowell T. Coggeshall, vice president and professor of medicine at the University of Chicago, warned.

A rapid survey should be made of potential drugs and new compounds, Dr. Coggeshall told SCIENCE SERVICE. Those "little used" in research or in limited diseases should be exempted from the new regulations, a procedure he believes could be accomplished by the FDA Commissioner.

"I believe a national reference body should be set up by the National Academy of Sciences," Dr. Coggeshall said, explaining that in this way problems of collective interest could be taken up with the FDA or other health agencies. The overemphasis on cost of paper work as a deterrent to future research on new drugs could disappear if FDA put out some questions and answers that would stop the anticipation of this expense.

Preliminary surveys of drug research have shown a drop in the number of projects, largely because of the anticipated expense. An FDA representative said, however, that

"no good scientist would be without records such as the FDA is requesting." Dr. Coggeshall said the Commission on Drug Safety called its first general scientific meeting in Chicago to bring together professional and scientific organizations and persons to "assess the drug safety situation." He is chairman of the commission.

The Commission on Drug Safety brings together government, industry and universities to advise each other of progress and problems of drug testing.

Dr. Frances O. Kelsey, chief of the investigational drug branch of the Food and Drug Administration, reviewed the objectives and functions of that branch at the Chicago meeting.

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More Thalidomide Tests

► THALIDOMIDE should be further studied to find out why it harms human embryos but not the unborn young of other mammals.

The Commission on Drug Safety reported the recommendations made at a Chicago conference on prenatal effects of drugs, urging that thalidomide be the first drug to be analyzed and investigated beyond the experimental level.

Until the effect of this drug is explained and understood, "administration of drugs to women of reproductive age must be made with great care."

Immediate establishment of workshops in which teratologists (experts in fetal malformations), pharmacologists, pediatricians and obstetricians can exchange information was suggested. There are only a few training centers in the United States for teratologists.

Monkeys and armadillos were recommended for study to determine whether they are suitable for predicting possible harmful effects of drugs to an unborn child.

Some other points relating to prenatal effects of drugs:

Animal tests available now do not guarantee drug safety to the human fetus.

Minimal standards of drug purity must be established.

Use of radioactively labeled drugs could be developed in studies of drug effects.

Full logistic and financial support must be given to investigators who are seeking to clarify the mechanisms involved in the action of thalidomide.

Dr. Josef Warkany of the University of Cincinnati's Children's Hospital Research Foundation was chairman of the conference on prenatal effects of drugs, which brought together 15 other experts.

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SOCIOLOGY

Stealing and Addiction Are Linked Problems

► A PHYSICIAN who has worked extensively with narcotic addicts predicts that 80% of all juvenile delinquents would grow out of their delinquency if they did not become drug users.

The anti-social tendencies that make a youth steal cars also make him go out and look for narcotics, Dr. B. W. Casselman, chief of medicine at the Synanon Foundation in Los Angeles, told SCIENCE SERVICE.

Many an addict has told Dr. Casselman "the first time I tried it I found just what I needed."

From his experience with addicts, Dr. Casselman said he has learned that "you cannot be a drug addict without really trying." Medical addiction from physical illness, he has found, is negligible.

The reason that many delinquents do become addicts and do not overcome delinquency, Dr. Casselman said, is that drugs are so readily available.

They have been easy to obtain ever since treatment of addiction became illegal in 1924, and criminal syndicates moved in to supply the drugs.

Also, the general idea in our society—being beamed at us every day by radio and television—that taking various pills will cure all one's ills has had a psychological effect on young minds.

No happy youngster is ever lured into drug addiction, Dr. Casselman said. It is always a "sick sociopath" who is looking for the drug.

In treating addicts, Dr. Casselman said he has found withdrawal pains are the lowest when drugs are completely removed. The greatest pain comes from the personality problems that cause a person to become an addict in the first place.

This observation has been proved at Synanon, where the "cold turkey" treatment of complete withdrawal from drugs is practiced.

Dr. Casselman said the reason for the 33% "cure rate" at Synanon (the national U.S. cure rate is two percent) is frustration. The addicts who come to the Foundation have been through everything and therefore have a motivation for coming.

"These people have nowhere to go, except to jail," Dr. Casselman told fellow scientists at the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Stanford, Calif.

He urged a four-point plan to combat narcotics addiction:

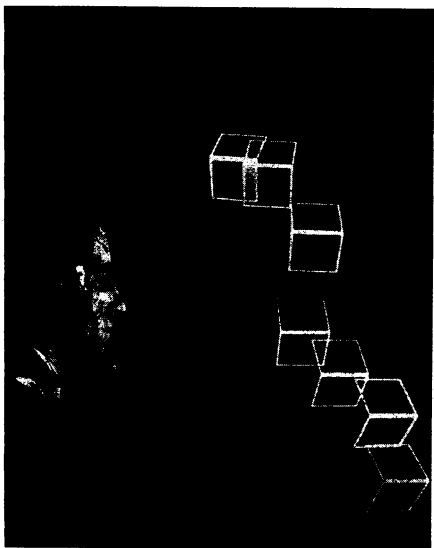
1. Take policemen out of the picture—they have never cured an addict, except by shooting him.

2. Bring physicians and scientists back into the picture to study and treat problems connected with and leading to addiction.

3. Teach in medical schools what addiction is, which is not now being done.

4. Admit addicts to hospitals where they can be cured. In many states they have the choice of going to jail or to state or county hospitals where the treatment is not thorough enough.

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General Dynamics/Astronautics

SPACE ILLUSIONS—Optical illusions, among the problems to be overcome in the sometimes topsy-turvy world of outer space, are studied at General Dynamics/Astronautics, San Diego. The composite picture shows how test "astronaut" Mahmood Yakut sees movement of a stationary box.