

Tranquilizer Affects Eyes

One of the tranquilizers used most often in treating psychiatric patients appears to cause eye damage after continued use—By Patricia McBroom

➤ ONE of the most valuable tranquilizers known for the treatment of mental illness may be having dangerous effects on the eyes.

This fear was expressed at an international meeting of psychopharmacologists in Washington, D.C. Dr. A. Potts, a professor of ophthalmology at the University of Chicago described himself as a "skeleton at the feast."

"We have these marvelous anti-psychotic drugs (the phenothiazines) and here we are having to talk about side effects that may make them inapplicable," he said.

The phenothiazines, particularly chlorpromazine, are used regularly in the treatment of schizophrenia. Recently scientists have noticed small changes in the eye lenses of patients taking chlorpromazine over several years. Many believe the changes are probably temporary and the eyes revert to normal when the drug is discontinued.

However, Dr. Potts doubts that damage is reversible in all cases. He said patients have shown decreased visual acuity, night blindness and an excess of pigmentation in the eyes.

A second speaker at the Collegium

Internationale Neuro - Psychopharmacologicum, Dr. M. Rubin of the Georgetown University Medical School, suggested a theory for this effect of chlorpromazine.

In long-term drug treatment, chlorpromazine accumulates in the cells, where it causes production of an "atypical" melanin or pigmentation. The new melanin does not have the ability to protect the individual against light rays and eyes are damaged.

Chlorpromazine itself does not react this way with melanin, he noted. But in the body the drug breaks down into a sulfoxide product that does.

On the other hand, Dr. Samuel De Long, professor of ophthalmology at the University of Pennsylvania, said evidence indicates that lens changes due to chlorpromazine are reversible. Probably 20% of the patients on this drug will show lesions of the lenses, according to a survey of all literature on the subject. However, very few of the changes have been serious and those that were did heal after the drug was discontinued, he said. Dr. De Long conducted the survey under the auspices of the National Institutes of Health.

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More Drugs Included Under Drug Abuse Law

➤ SIXTEEN DRUGS in addition to amphetamines and barbiturates have been brought under the new Drug Abuse Control Amendments. A symbol to identify these drugs has also been established.

The distinctive symbol will make it easy to identify the controlled drugs and will help manufacturers, distributors, pharmacists and others comply with the new law.

The symbol is a large C encircling an Rx (prescription drug symbol) set against a contrasting background.

Food and Drug Commissioner Dr. James L. Goddard, said the symbol will first appear on amphetamine and barbiturate products packaged after Sept. 1, 1966. These drugs were covered by the amendments when they became effective last Feb. 1.

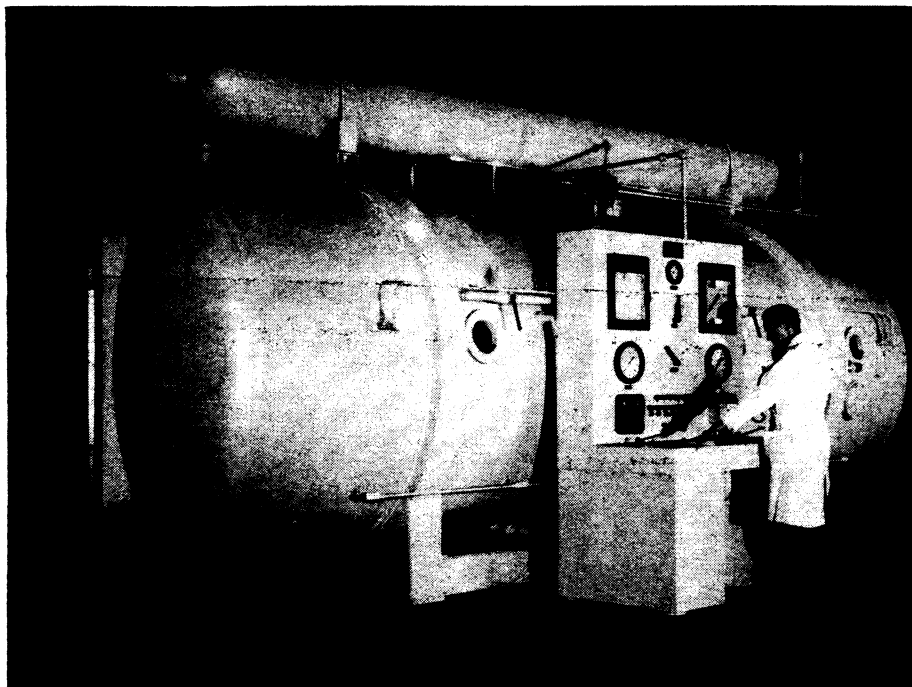
The symbol will appear on the additional 16 drugs packaged after Nov. 14, 1966. As FDA brings any other drug in under the amendments, the agency will allow 180 days for it to be packaged with the symbol.

FDA is requiring that the symbol be placed prominently on packages and labels so that wholesale and retail handlers, as well as physicians, can recognize those products to be under the control of the amendments.

The order bringing the 16 additional drugs under the new law becomes effective May 17, 1966.

The 16 include drugs having a potential for abuse and habit formation because of their stimulant effect on the central nervous system; drugs having a potential for abuse because of their depressant effect on the central nervous system, and drugs having a potential for abuse because of their hallucinatory effect.

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Bethlehem Corporation

WALK-IN HYPERBARIC CHAMBER—The walk-in size hyperbaric chamber now available from the Bethlehem Corporation, Bethlehem Pa., for medical treatment and research has sufficient air flow to allow 12 persons in the chamber at the same time. It is designed to insure that pressure will be maintained in the event of power supply failure.

ENTOMOLOGY

Fly Populations Cut by Overcrowding

➤ FERTILE PESTS could be killed or forced to move out of an area by the arrival of sterile relatives that could overload resources such as food and living space.

The overcrowding theory was tested on populations of Queensland fruit-flies, by Dr. J. Monro of the Waite Agricultural Research Institute of the University of Adelaide, Australia.

Three of four treated fly populations declined sharply within two days after the sterile flies had been introduced, he said in Science, 151:1537, 1966.

This method of population control, called "population flushing," may prove a means of controlling populations of harmful pests, Dr. Monro believes.

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