

# Addict Program Launched

Dope addicts are being taught to cure themselves—By Patricia McBroom

► WITH CAUTIOUS optimism, New York City has officially launched a fresh attack on dope addiction, hoping to duplicate or at least approach the exceptional success a new concept in rehabilitation has enjoyed in Puerto Rico.

Dr. Efren Ramirez, New York's newly installed Coordinator for Addiction Programs, conceived the program to rehabilitate the addicts of Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico. Its success has been reported at 95%.

Basically the program is divided into three phases, spanning two to three years, deputy coordinator George Jacobs told SCIENCE SERVICE.

It begins on a rather low key in a neighborhood "orientation center" staffed by ex-addicts, and ends with a certificate of "complete rehabilitation" signed by the mayor of New York.

A key innovation is the lengthy preparation or induction phase, said Mr. Jacobs. The idea is not to treat the addict right away, but to prepare him to become a patient by softening his negative attitudes toward doctors and rehabilitation.

Because they cannot be coned, the best people to perform this function are ex-addicts. Thus, at the center, which may be a store, church or other building, the man who has kicked the habit has the job of convincing the man who has not that the addict's problem is of his own choosing and is curable.

From the center, the addict goes to a day hospital, still with no professional people, where he begins to talk about his problem. Then detoxication begins. In all, the induction phase may take three to six months, Mr. Jacobs said, before the addict is hospitalized for phase two, lasting up to a year and a half.

Hospitalization need not mean a hospital, he said. It could be a farm, since the addict's treatment consists of group therapy, not expensive equipment. Psychiatrists handle the treatment phase, but ex-addicts may occasionally lead the therapy sessions.

As in all recent approaches to mental health on a mass scale, New York's project must make maximum use of minimal facilities and professional staff by using aides—in this case, ex-addicts.

In phase three, the addict reenters society ready to begin work. During re-entry he continues group therapy and perhaps returns to the neighborhood orientation center as a staffer. If after a year, he is still "clean," the addict receives a certificate testifying that he is completely rehabilitated.

This puts the Mayor's name on the line, Mr. Jacobs said. But program officials hope the "diploma" will encourage employers who have in the past been burned by hiring ex-addicts.

"Our idea is not to do things for the addict," Mr. Jacobs emphasized, but to develop insight. He said the city has no intention for instance, of installing television sets and magazines in the neighborhood orientation centers.

Underlying the program is the theory that dope addiction is a symptom of a character disorder. If narcotics were not available, the addict would find something else. Thus, treatment must aim at retraining attitudes—eventually bringing the addict to recognize he is the author of his own choices.

## MEDICINE

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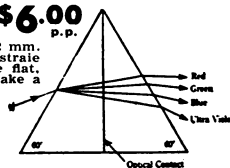
Other members of the research team were Drs. Marcia K. Bilbao and Thomas B. Hutchins IV.

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