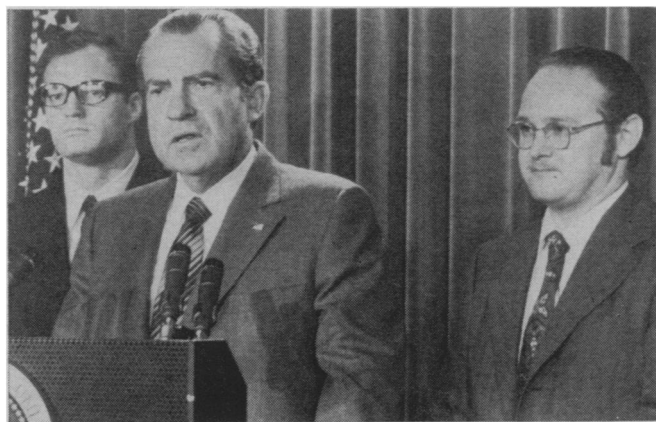


Trying to treat the 'White Plague'

President Nixon announces new directions
in drug abuse control but not everyone
agrees with his approach to the problem



World Wide Photos

Nixon says Dr. Jaffe will have his complete support.

Prohibition doesn't work. It didn't work with alcohol and it isn't working with drugs. The Nixon Administration tried to control drug abuse with strong prohibitive law enforcement for two years. But the inflow and use of drugs have continued and the problem is now epidemic in proportion.

Last week the President took a new stand on the problem. In a 10-page message to Congress he stated that drug abuse is public enemy number one and must be treated primarily as a medical problem. To coordinate this redirected effort the President appointed Dr. Jerome H. Jaffe, a University of Chicago psychiatrist and head of the Illinois Department of Mental Health drug rehabilitation program. Dr. Jaffe, a methadone proponent, sets his goal at rehabilitation of the nation's estimated 250,000 narcotics addicts. To do this he will have strong Presidential backing as head of the new Special Action Office of Drug Abuse Prevention. The President also asked Congress for an additional \$155 million—giving a total of \$371 million—for programs to control drug abuse in America. With this new office and additional money Dr. Jaffe will have an "over-all responsibility for all major Federal drug abuse prevention, education, treatment, rehabilitation, training and research programs in all Federal agencies."

Dr. Robert L. DuPont, director of the Washington, D.C. Narcotics Treatment Administration, praises the President for his initiative and for a non-political appointment. But he says the funds requested will be inadequate. In Washington alone there are about 17,000 addicts who each require \$2,000 worth of treatment a year. If, as Dr. DuPont suggests, there are actually 500,000 addicts in the country, the cost of treatment will be much higher than the President expects. Even so, Dr. DuPont says, "We have more hope now than we did two weeks ago," and he continues, "Dr. Jaffe is an extraordinarily able person."

Of special interest to the President

is the recently brought-to-light problem of drug addiction among Vietnam servicemen. This problem, as the President stated in his message to Congress, will be tackled by the military. Lt. General Robert C. Taber, who will head the new military effort, estimated conservatively that 10 percent of American servicemen presently in Vietnam use heroin and half of these are heavily addicted (12,000). Other estimates are much higher but the true figures should soon be known. Starting this week every American leaving Vietnam will be tested on a new \$26,000 machine that detects opiate use. Anyone showing opiate presence in his urine sample will be held in Vietnam for a seven-day detoxification period and then sent to a Veterans' Administration or private hospital near his next duty station for 30 to 60 days of rehabilitation.

To persons not into the realities of the drug problem these measures and the President's emphasis on medical rehabilitation will seem a step in the right direction—away from strict law enforcement and prohibition toward a more humane and realistic attitude. But to some people who work constantly with the problem it is no step at all. Dr. Judianne Densen-Gerber says "it is no program, it is worse than no program." As executive director of Odyssey House, an addiction treatment center in New York that has treated more than 500 teenage addicts in the last two years, she feels that the Administration's new program is too little, too late. "There is no evidence," she says, "to indicate that rehabilitation can be accomplished in 60 days, and there is much evidence to the contrary." Odyssey House experience has shown her that 18 and perhaps 24 months of treatment are necessary to rehabilitate hard core addicts. "Releasing addicted servicemen with anything less than complete treatment will destroy our youth."

Dr. Densen-Gerber cites the case of one addicted soldier who was returned home to a town in Utah. Within a few months he had turned on at least

50 adolescents to heroin. "If President Nixon releases 75,000 such addicted trained killers on our ill-equipped cities he will be destroying our youth and our whole way of life." She predicts that at the present rate there will be more than two million addicts in America within the next two years. Dr. Densen-Gerber, emphatic about the dangers of heroin or the "White Plague," will present her views this week to the members of the Senate Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse.

Another viewpoint on the problem comes from Dr. Thomas S. Szasz, a professor of psychiatry at the State University of New York Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse. He feels that a man should be free to put into his body whatever he wants and that prohibition is the cause for the recent escalation of deterioration of our cities. Although he is against drug addiction he says that the Administration's new steps are criminal and that "failure in drug control by these means is even more certain than our military failure in Vietnam." He says that mandatory testing of GI's is "anti-American and unconstitutional in the most profound sense." The President's medical approach amounts to "the Nazification of medicine."

Dr. Szasz faults the American Medical Association for going along with the President on a problem that is political and not medical. This week in Atlantic City, Mr. Nixon spoke at the AMA annual meeting in an attempt to rally support for his program. He got an enthusiastic response to his call for the nation's doctors to mount a program against drug abuse in the United States similar to the one they have undertaken to care for the sick and wounded in Vietnam.

Despite the lack of any consensus about approach, the publicity about the drug epidemic has, as Dr. DuPont says, encouraged many people to search for solutions. Many have been offered, but as yet none has been shown to be viable. □