

behavioral sciences

Psychotherapy for terminal patients

Since 1967 most of the terminal cancer patients at two London hospitals have been getting, five or six times a day, a special cocktail of heroin, cocaine and 190-proof ethyl alcohol. At Baltimore's Sinai Hospital 50 terminal cancer patients have been given doses of LSD. The results were reported at a Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center symposium. About 99 percent of the heroin-treated patients get adequate relief from severe pain, and have less nausea and vomiting than when treated with morphine. Of those treated with LSD, 36 percent showed dramatic improvement, 36 percent showed moderate improvement and 19 percent were unchanged.

R. G. Twycross, reporting on the London experiment said: "It is very unusual to encounter true psychological addiction. Patients do not develop a craving for the drug when they no longer have to crave relief for the pain." The Baltimore researchers, Walter N. Pahnke, Stanislav Grof, Louis E. Goodman and Albert A. Kurland, conclude from their experiment that the effects of drug treatment and intensive psychotherapy are about the same and can not be clearly separated.

Children's TV programming

The Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior (SN: 9/18/71, p. 190) is due to report its findings next month. The findings, based on 25 research projects, are expected to be used as a basis for strong recommendations to the Federal Trade Commission and the Federal Communications Commission.

In an attempt to forestall possible Governmental intervention, the American Broadcasting Co. has proposed stricter regulations on the amount of time devoted to commercials, credits and non-program material during children's programs.

The network will reduce maximum non-program time from 16 to 11 minutes per half hour during children's TV shows—if the other two major networks will do the same. This, however, will probably not be enough. Evelyn Sarson of Action for Children's Television in Boston says this is only "a first step toward something we've been talking about for four years now."

Integration and education

In 1942 only two percent of Southern whites favored school integration. The University of Chicago National Opinion Research Center reports in the December SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN that almost half are now in favor. Nationally, the percentage has risen from 30 to 75 percent in favor of school integration. This acceptance of integration was expected by many to aid minority students in obtaining a better education. Recent studies find that, so far, this is not the case.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (SN: 5/1/71, p. 306) last week released its first analysis of results by race. Black students scored 12 to 16 percent below the national average in scientific knowledge. The United States Commission on Civil Rights report on education in the Southwest finds that Mexican-Americans, Indians and blacks "do not obtain the benefits of public education at a rate equal to that of their Anglo classmates."

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The impact of death

After seeing her 11-year-old sister die in a severe asthmatic attack, a 7-year-old girl developed her first asthmatic attack a day later. The attacks disappeared after about two weeks, only to reoccur briefly at each subsequent anniversary of her sister's death.

This post-bereavement identification is not exceptional and psychoanalysts generally consider it to be an internal defense mechanism—a personal means of lessening the loss of a loved one. Albert C. Cain and Irene Fast of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, studying the impact of death upon a family, find that this is more than a subjective thing and feel researchers have paid insufficient attention to identifications based on changes in family structure. An example, they say, is the parent who practically imposes the characteristics of a deceased parent or sibling on a surviving child. They barrage the child with worries and warnings that increasingly convince the child that he too will die as his brother or sister did. Cain and Fast conclude that the phenomenon is far more complex than has so far been assumed.

Abortion statistics

Because a great number of states have liberalized their abortion laws and policies it is now possible to accurately determine who gets abortions, how and when. At a New York meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex, the Population Council released data on 42,598 abortions performed between mid-1970 and mid-1971. Data on another 30,000 abortions have not yet been analyzed.

Christopher Tietze is director of the council's biomedical division. He reported that the most common patient is a young, single, white woman pregnant for the first time. About 50 percent of the abortions were done between the 9th and 12th weeks and 71 percent were done in the first trimester. The most common procedure used was vacuum aspiration or suction (69.5 percent). There were 4,303 reported complications (mostly minor) and four deaths (all involving second trimester abortions). "I feel," says Tietze, "that the most important thing the study shows us so far is that there are still far too many abortions being done after the first trimester. I think we have to make a strong educational effort to correct this."

Testing cognitive style

Each person has a unique cognitive style or method of using past experiences in attempts to solve problems. Students entering Oakland Community College are observed during a three-hour sequence that includes experiments especially designed to evaluate cognitive style. Results of this testing are used to answer basic questions: Does the student prefer to read or listen? Is he concerned only with his own point of view or is he influenced in decision-making by family or peers? Does he reason more like a mathematician, a social scientist or artist?

The answers help tailor the student's learning activities (study methods and courses) to those areas in which he excels. Results at the college show that student performance has improved from a national average of 50 percent success in course study to 87 percent success.

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