

# psychiatric notes

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## ABORTION

### Colorado's 900 percent increase

Since Colorado liberalized its abortion law (SN: 6/3/67, p. 526), legal abortions have increased 900 percent—from less than 1 per 1,000 live births to 8 per 1,000.

Dr. Abraham Heller, assistant director of Denver General Hospital's Psychiatric Services, reports that most of the abortions are being authorized for psychiatric reasons, to guard the mental health of the mother.

These women are not usually severely mentally ill, but tend to be the unemancipated teenager and the middle-aged widowed or divorced woman with three children, says Dr. Heller.

In the nine months following the new law broadening grounds for abortion, 224 women were granted legal operations. Denver General performed 109 operations, 90 percent of them for psychiatric reasons. Other grounds for abortion in Colorado now include danger of a defective fetus, rape, or life threat to the mother.

Dr. Heller points out that despite the large percentage increase, the number of abortions is quite small. Many hospitals are still reluctant to approve the operation because of public fears that Colorado will become an abortion mecca. That fear has not been realized, he said.

## SENILITY

### Dementia halted by drug

The progress of senile dementia, a mental disease of the aged, is halted and, in some cases, partially reversed by the use of an anticoagulant drug.

This report comes from Dr. Arthur C. Walsh of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, who has treated 24 patients with the drug Dicumarol. In nearly all patients, says Dr. Walsh, Dicumarol prevented the progressive signs of senile and presenile dementia.

Use of the drug is based on the theory that inadequate blood flow to various areas of the brain causes undernourished brain tissue eventually to die. By thinning the blood, an anticoagulant drug improves circulation, Dr. Walsh proposes.

Dr. Walsh treated 11 stroke patients and 13 senile dementia patients with Dicumarol. He says deterioration stopped completely once therapy began. Some patients even showed improvement—which usually reverted to deterioration whenever Dicumarol was stopped.

If these findings can be verified by other investigators, says Dr. Walsh, this common form of insanity can be nearly eliminated with early treatment.

## NEUROSIS

### Athleticism marks certain patients

As a group, neurotic men appear to differ sharply from their healthy counterparts on a trait called athleticism, reports Scotland's James Crawford Little, director of clinical research at Crichton Royal Hospital in Dumfries.

Of 72 neurotics studied at the St. James Hospital in Leeds, England, 39 percent had, throughout life, displayed an excessive devotion to physical prowess. Only 9 percent of the men in a healthy group had such exclusive concern with their bodies.

An even larger number of the neurotic men—42 percent—displayed opposite traits: They had shunned sports and physical activity in general all their lives. These men were relatively introverted and unsocial.

Of the two groups, the athletic types had the worse prognosis, he said. Although they were highly extroverted and lacked a history of emotional trouble, in three-fourths of the cases a minor illness or injury set off a serious crisis, sending many into "crippling personal and social maladjustment for years despite intensive treatment."

The athlete's neurosis is not uncommon, said Dr. Little, and there are reasons to suspect it might become even more common in future urban societies.

In general, a normal balanced attitude toward physical activity was uncommon in men who developed neurosis.

## DISTURBED CHILDREN

### Tuning parents in and out

A disturbed child will tune in the parent who gives him the most love and tune out the other. This tendency toward selective hearing could be an important source of trouble in the child's later life, reports Dr. Vivian M. Rakoff of McGill University, Montreal.

In a study of 32 families, Dr. Rakoff has found that the early trend toward hearing one parent over the other is generalized to outsiders. If the child hears his mother's voice preferentially, he will also have a tendency to listen more to women than men.

The McGill investigators recorded 60 sentences from each set of parents and then played them simultaneously into the child's ears. The child was then asked to recall what he had heard.

Dr. Rakoff says the disturbed children were clearly distinguished from their non-disturbed brothers and sisters in this selective listening. They also differed from control families. Such exclusion reduces chances of the child identifying with the parent he hears less, says Dr. Rakoff, and, in a larger sense, restricts his perception of the world.

## SEDATIVES

### Marked effects on sleep and behavior

Most sedative drugs change sleeping patterns and alter behavior and body chemistry, both during the drugged period and for two nights after, reports Dr. Anthony Kales, psychiatrist at the University of California in Los Angeles. Dr. Kales' team studied Doriden (glutethimide), Noctec (chloral hydrate), Noludar (methyprylon), Nembutal (pentobarbital), Benadryl (diphenhydramine) and Quaalude (methaqualone). All but Noctec reduced dreaming time and delayed its onset. After chloral hydrate, there was a decrease in aggression, anxiety, depression and fatigue; the opposite was true of glutethimide.

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